

No. 736

FEB. 4, 1911

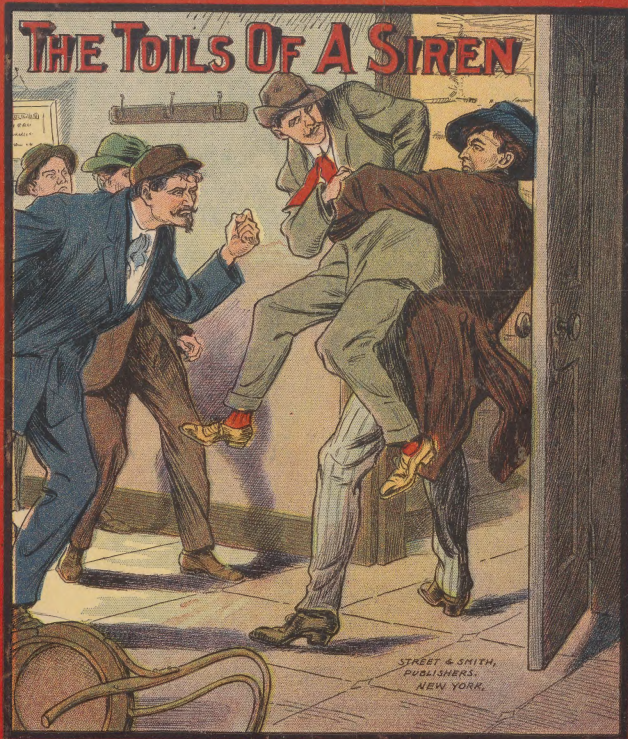
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NICK CARTER

NEW
WEEKLY

REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

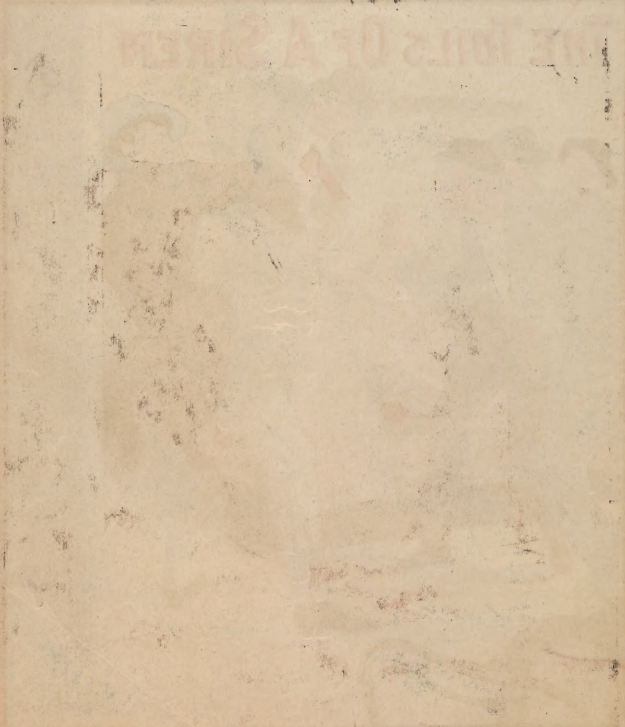
THE TOILS OF A SIREN



Nick seized the disguised leader in his arms, raised him clear of the floor, and dashed into the street.

NICK CARTER

THE TELL OF A SHIP



NICK CARTER

WEEKLY

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

Issued Weekly. By subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, 73-80 Seventh Ave., N. Y. Copyright, 1911, by STREET & SMITH.

No. 736.

NEW YORK February, 4, 1911.

Price Five Cents.

THE TOILS OF A SIREN;

OR,

Nick Carter's Busiest Day.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERY.

Nick Carter frowned, and read again the article that had attracted his attention in the morning paper; then he put it aside, closed his eyes, and leaned his head back against the cushion of the seat he occupied in the Pullman.

He was returning from a trip to St. Louis. He had been absent from New York a few days more than three weeks. He had been unusually occupied, and had had no time to give his attention to anything at all other than the matter that had taken him away from home.

The time of day was approaching noon, and he had succeeded in securing a sheaf of the New York morning papers, at Albany, and the article that had attracted his attention and brought the frown to his brows was what a newspaper man would have called a "beat," in one of them.

We will not quote the article in full, since that is not necessary, but we will give excerpts from it, because it will give us a better understanding of why the frown

came to the brow of the detective, and why, after reading what the paper had to tell, he closed his eyes and leaned back against the upholstery to think.

Eliminating the "heads" which the copy reader had made as sensational as possible, the story that Nick Carter read was as follows:

"Jeanne Coudert has disappeared, and there are divided opinions as to whether she is only temporarily out of sight and beyond the ken of official knowledge, or if it may not be that she has played a clever trick upon the public, and is, therefore, now at large, prepared to renew her activities. . . . It is certain that she has disappeared, and that no man can say where she has gone, or what has become of her.

"The story of Jeanne Coudert is an astounding and an interesting one. It reads more like a sensational novel than a relation of facts. It began when she was very young—barely more than a child—and it has continued as it began, till now; and there are at least two men in the city of New York who do not hesitate to assert that the end is not yet. It would seem, too, that these two men speak with authority, because ever since the first appearance of the strange and beautiful woman in New York they have had more or less to do with her.

"These two men are the assistants of Nicholas Carter, detective, and they are, respectively, Mr. Chickering Carter and Mr. Patrick Garvan. Although they both declined to talk for publication, insisting that it was not within their duties to do so, neither of them hesitated to make the foregoing assertion that 'the end is not yet.' Nicholas Carter is, himself, absent from the city, and it is not known—or, at least, it is not stated—when he will return; but it would be interesting to know just what he would have to say regarding the strange disappearance of Jeanne Coudert—or of her dead body: Which?

"That is the question the authorities are asking themselves, and the story of the disappearance leaves the answer to it very much in the air. Briefly, it is this: After her arrest, four weeks ago, she was detained at police headquarters overnight, and it was found, in the morning following, that she had been taken very ill, and seemed to be suffering intensely. It was at first supposed that she had taken poison in an attempt to commit suicide, but this idea was finally abandoned, and it was decided by the physician who was called to attend her, that she was a very sick woman indeed, and she was, therefore, transferred to one of the city hospitals, where, ever since that time, her case has puzzled the leading medical experts of New York.

"And now comes the remarkable part of the story: 'Last night a representative of this paper had occasion to visit the hospital where Jeanne Coudert has been undergoing treatment. In passing from the building he encountered one of the doctors who is personally known to him, and stopped to exchange greetings, during which the doctor made the startling announcement that it might interest the newspaper man to know that Jeanne Coudert had just died. The information did interest him; he asked permission to see the body, and was conducted by his friend to the small room to which the body had been temporarily removed.

"It may be said, in passing, that the woman had been one of the four patients in the smallest ward of that hospital; that the other three patients in that ward were practically convalescent, and that the bed occupied by the Coudert woman was kept screened off from view of the others in that room.

"While viewing the supposititious dead body of the famous—or infamous—woman, the reporter asked many questions of his friend concerning her illness, and her death; but the sum and substance of the replies were as unsatisfactory as they have always been, in reference to her illness, ever since she was admitted to the hospital. In a word, the physicians are as much at sea now as they were when the strange case first attracted their attention. But, concerning the death of the woman, the doctor was more explicit. He had stepped into that room to see her less than half an hour before and had found her dead. That was all there was of it. There had been not the shadow of a doubt in his mind that she was dead, and he had hastened to summon the head nurse and an orderly, and the re-

mains were taken at once to the room where the reporter saw them.

"The reporter returned to his newspaper to write the story of the circumstance in the full realization that he had a 'beat' on the other morning papers, and he had just completed the general story that is recounted here when he was summoned to the telephone by that same doctor at the hospital, and received the startling intelligence that the supposedly dead body of Jeanne Coudert had disappeared from the little room where the reporter had been taken to see it.

"He lost no time in hastening back to the hospital for further information on the subject, but he found that there was no further information obtainable, because there was none to give. The doctor who had been the reporter's first informant stated merely that he had summoned other physicians to the hospital to view the body, and that, when, in company with three of them, he returned to that room just forty minutes after he had visited it with the reporter, the body was no longer there. It had disappeared, and no person could be found about the hospital who could give the least bit of information concerning it.

"There was not time before this newspaper went to press to make a detailed investigation. It was just possible to call Nick Carter's two assistants on the telephone, and to obtain that significant statement of five words from them: 'The end is not yet.'

"But this relation of facts, so far as it goes, is entirely correct. Jeanne Coudert was dead. Last night, at nine-fifty-five o'clock, Jeanne Coudert was pronounced dead by one of the doctors who had been in constant attendance upon her; at ten-forty-five that same doctor encountered the reporter and related the circumstance to him; at ten-fifty the reporter saw the body of the woman, and, so far as his lay knowledge goes, can assert that she was dead, or at least appeared so to him. At eleven-fifteen the reporter came away from the hospital, and reported at his newspaper at eleven-forty-five. At eleven-fifty-five four doctors entered the room where the dead body was supposed to be awaiting them, to discover that it was no longer there: that it had disappeared in a cloud of utter mystery. It was nearly one o'clock in the morning before the excitement, and the search, consequent upon the strange disappearance, had subsided sufficiently for the doctor who had given the reporter the news to bethink himself of this added intelligence which this newspaper should have, and so made use of the telephone, as has been stated; and it was nearly two o'clock before the reporter was back again at his desk."

Added to this statement of the reporter who had secured the "beat" was a write-up of the career of Jeanne Coudert, done in the office, in a department which is called "The Morgue," where such write-ups are kept on tap, ready for any emergency that may arise. It related that Jeanne Coudert was twenty-six years

old, the descendant of a once noble family in the province of Touraine, France, beautiful, gifted, talented.

It stated that early in her career she had been involved in a criminal matter which had started her on her career of crime, and that she had long been an eyesore to the police of Paris, because they had found it impossible to convict her.

She fascinated judges, juries, lawyers—everybody who came in contact with her, and inevitably found a loophole by which to escape the clutches of the law.

In Paris she had been twice tried, and twice acquitted, for murder; she had played havoc with the hearts of men, from the highest down; she seemed always to be bountifully supplied with money, though none had ever discovered the source of her supply.

Over there she had met an American millionaire named Samuel Coddington, and later she had followed him to America.

It was supposed that she had murdered the wife of Coddington, and was, in reality, responsible also for Coddington's death in an automobile accident near Philadelphia; and at the time of her own supposed death she was, though ill and in a semistupor all the time, under indictment for the murder of her own cousin, one Yvonne Coudert, whom, after killing, she had impersonated.

More than that, she had forged a will, executed in Paris, purporting to have been made by Samuel Coddington, and, if it had not been for the activities of Nick Carter, would have gotten away with the goods.

Briefly, such was the story of her career up to the moment of the remarkable happening at the hospital in the city of New York.*

Nick Carter read carefully every word that had been written about her, culling therefrom such facts as he desired to retain in his memory, although he could have added much to that written account of the remarkable woman.

And that was why he laid the paper aside, closed his eyes, leaned his head against the cushion, and thought.

He had supposed that Jeanne Coudert's career of crime was ended.

He had believed that she could not again escape the meshes of the law, that were now wrapped around her.

Once tried and acquitted, charged with the murder of Vera Coddington, he was certain that she would not be able to escape the consequences of her last crime, the killing of her own cousin, Yvonne Coudert.

On that other occasion it was said that she bewitched the jury, and that, because there was only circumstantial evidence against her, she had been acquitted; but in the last case the evidence would have been direct, and Nick Carter had confidently looked for a conviction.

But she had found another means of escaping the law.

CHAPTER II.

FACING THE FACTS.

When the train rolled in at the station in New York, Nick Carter remained seated until all the other passengers had debarked; then he seized his grip and went out very quietly, dodging behind other people as best he could, for it was suddenly his wish to return to his home unannounced, and with nobody the wiser for his coming.

And so, half an hour later, he arrived at his own house, where he found Chick and Patsy both awaiting him, for they had been informed of his coming.

His first duty was to glance over his accumulated mail. True, it had all been examined by his assistants already, but he wished to review it himself; and they waited in silence in his study until he laid aside the last letter and raised his eyes to them.

"Jeanne Coudert is getting busy again," he said, then; and they nodded, without replying.

"Of course that is all nonsense about her being dead," he added. "She is as much alive as we are. I had my doubts about her being really ill at all, when she was reported so."

They nodded in unison again.

"Have either of you been to the hospital?" Nick demanded.

"Both of us," replied Chick.

"Well, what did you make out of it all?"

"Nothing."

"Eh?"

"Not a thing. There isn't anything to add to that first report in the paper, although the afternoon papers have all had extras out, with columns of stuff about it. Nobody has dug up a thing that is interesting, though."

"Did you see that doctor who was the first to find her, after she was supposed to be dead?"

"Yes. He is like a crazy man, now. He has already handed in his resignation, at the hospital."

"Oh, he has, eh? What is his name?"

"Kregoff."

*See the two preceding numbers of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

"What's his full name? Where does he live, and where did he come from? How old is he, and what do you know about him?"

"Doctor Emil Kregoff. He lives in furnished rooms in Twentieth Street. His people came from Warsaw, Poland, but he was born in this country. He graduated in medicine here, and then went abroad to study."

"I thought your reply would be something like that. He was almost too eager to give that reporter the news. What about the other doctors?"

"You mean—which ones?"

"The three that he took to the room where the body had disappeared?"

"The body had already disappeared when he took them there," said Patsy.

"Yes; but they had been in attendance upon the case before that. At least they had been consulted. Have either of you seen these doctors, or any of them?"

"All three of them," replied Chick. "I saw two, and Patsy interviewed the other one."

"What do they have to say about it?"

"Nothing. They are noncommittal. They talk medical terms, and platitudes; nothing else."

"What about the nurses and the orderlies at the hospital?"

"Nothing doing. There isn't a grain of information anywhere."

"What are the facts of the case, as you know them?"

"Precisely as that first reporter recounted them."

"But Jeanne could not have walked out of a place like that without being seen by somebody."

"Not unless that somebody was 'seen' first," replied Patsy, with a grin.

Nick nodded with emphasis.

"The whole thing is a plant from start to finish; there isn't a doubt of that," he said. "Bribery and corruption. Has any one of the nurses, or orderlies, disappeared?"

"Not one."

"Do they account for themselves satisfactorily, at the time she is supposed to have—er—disappeared?"

"Oh, yes. One was attending to another patient; another was writing a report; another had gone for water; another was heating some milk; and so on, and so on, ad libitum. They all account for themselves, all right. Nobody saw Jeanne leave the place—and you cannot connect a person of what that person did not see."

"I don't suppose it would do us much good, any-

how, to know just how the thing was done," said the detective. "That will all materialize in good time, and Jeanne is much too smart to permit anything connected with the escape to lead us to her hiding place. The whole thing just now is that she has escaped; that she is at liberty, and that we have got to find her!"

There was another nod from the two assistants.

"You say that Kregoff has resigned?" asked Nick.

"Yes; at least, that is the report. I have not had it authenticated."

"It doesn't make any difference. Of course, he aided Jeanne. There can be no doubt of that, I think."

"Patsy and I both thought as you do about that."

"Of course. The question is, will she permit him to keep in touch with her, and is he, therefore, worth watching?"

"I hardly think so, if I may express an opinion," said Chick.

"Why?"

"You answered that question for yourself a moment ago, chief," said Patsy. "Jeanne Coudert is much too smart to permit anything that occurred at the hospital to lead to her hiding place after she escaped. All the same, I don't believe she bribed Kregoff with money?"

"With what, then?"

"With kisses, more likely; or something approximating kisses. With the promise of them, let us say."

"Not unlikely, Patsy. She was supposed to be in a condition of semistupor when she was taken to the hospital, wasn't she?"

"Not so much semistupor as semiconsciousness. Outwardly it has the same sound, but I suppose there is a difference."

"It was supposed to be an affliction that was something like aphasia, wasn't it?"

"Uh-huh; a sort of return to childhood. She played it mighty well, too."

"I don't suppose either of you really knew anything about it, until this thing happened, did you?"

"No."

"I can't criticize you for that, for I didn't myself. I was too busy; and, anyway, it is our business to catch such people; not to keep them after they are caught."

"I have an idea that she will leave the country now, chief," said Patsy.

"I haven't; at least, not at once."

"Why not?"

"Because she'll be a whole lot safer from apprehension, by keeping quiet, than she would be in trying to get away."

"I guess that's true."

"And, for another thing——"

He stopped, and presently, as he did not continue, Chick asked:

"What were you about to say, Nick?"

"I don't believe that she has given up her desire to obtain those Coddington millions, yet."

"I don't see how she could accomplish that, Nick. That lawyer that she had, when she posed as Yvonne, went right over to the other side. The will which was forged in Paris, under the direction of Jeanne, has been thrown out of court, and the old will of Sam Coddington was probated, became inoperative because there was no one to inherit under it, and now Sylvester Coddington has been appointed administrator of the estate, and——"

"Oh, yes; and he gets it all. Well, it would be Jeanne's play, now, to get him."

"Eh?"

"You heard me."

"Sure; but——"

"It is a fortune worth striving for, Chick. Jeanne came over to this country purposely to possess herself of it, and I don't believe she has abandoned the idea, either."

"Perhaps not."

"It isn't alone the idea that there is so much of it, and that she wants it, either."

"What then?"

"Jeanne Coudert is made of the sort of stuff that doesn't like to be beaten. I have succeeded in beating her twice, and now she will want to have a third try at it."

"But I don't see how."

"There isn't much use in conjecturing upon what she may do; we must find out what she is doing. What time did you get the first intimation of what had happened at the hospital, Chick?"

"When that reporter telephoned here, to interview Patsy and me."

"What time was that?"

"At midnight."

"What did you do then?"

"Nothing. There wasn't anything to do."

"You might have gone to the hospital at once."

"I couldn't see that it would do any good, Nick. I did put on my hat, with the intention of going there, but I threw it aside again. She wouldn't leave any sort of a trail there."

"I suppose you are right about that."

"It struck me as it did you, and at once, that she could not have carried out the thing at all without help—and that the one who helped her must necessarily have been that doctor who gave the reporter the news. I figured it out that he was the only one she had bribed, personally, and that he had attended to the rest of it."

"The orderly, eh? And perhaps one or more of the nurses?"

"Yes."

"It is as you say, Chick, or rather as Patsy said, that something more than money was employed in that bribery business. Jeanne is a perfect siren when it comes to twisting men around her fingers."

"Yes, I know."

"She has filled him up with promises of what she would do when once she was well out of that fix; she has mapped out the whole thing for him, and he has simply obeyed her directions, working in conjunction with somebody on the outside."

"Of course."

"The Paris chief told me that Jeanne was at the head of a secret society of criminals in Paris. She had her outside help from that source, doubtless."

"That is almost certain, I think, Nick."

"Well, there is one thing that we must remember: She won't keep a single promise that she made to Kregoff, and he will get sore because she does not. That is one weak point in her armor—if she doesn't find a way to nullify it."

CHAPTER III.

BEGINNING A PLAY FOR MILLIONS.

"Patsy," said the detective, after a pause, "take Danny and the car, and go and find the doctor. Bring him here when you have found him."

"Kregoff?"

"Of course."

"Suppose he won't come here to see you?"

"I said 'bring him here'; I didn't take into consideration whether he would want to come or not."

"Kidnap him, eh, if he won't come any other way?"

"Bring him here; that is all. I don't much care how you do it, only get him here. I want to talk with him in this house—as soon as possible."

"All right. I'll do it—somehow."

"That's the way to talk. Skip. Now, Chick."

"Yes?"

"And you, too, Patsy: Just let it appear that I

have not returned. I won't be in evidence for the present. If any one asks for me, or if there are any messages from headquarters, even, in regard to this matter, don't let it appear that I have returned. Tell Joseph that, as you go out, Patsy."

"All right."

"Now, Chick."

"Yes?"

"Call up Sylvester Coddington. He struck me as being rather bright and smart, the last time I talked with him. He has got ideas. I want to use him—and them."

"What shall I say to him?"

"Ask him to come here to the house, as soon as he can make it convenient to do so."

"To see you?"

"No; to see you. He is not to know that I am here, for the present; at least, not until I have overheard him in conversation with you, after he arrives."

"Anything more to suggest before I call up?"

"Yes. Open the ball by asking him if he has seen the account of the escape of Jeanne; say that you want to discuss the matter with him. That is all."

There was an interval of silence while Chick used the phone, during which the detective fixed his eyes on the blank wall and thought deeply. Then Chick hung up the receiver and said:

"He was just going out. His car was at the door. He says he will be here in about fifteen minutes."

"Good. Now, when he gets here, take him into the reception room. Get out of him all his ideas about this escape of Jeanne's—and then suggest to him that she has made her escape with the definite idea of getting after those millions that he has just inherited."

"I understand."

"He will scout the idea, of course. He will say that it is preposterous; but impress him with the thought that she will get after him, and the estate, too. Make him feel sure of it, and when you have done that, ask him if he is willing to do anything that you may ask of him to assist in the recapture of the woman."

"He will agree to that, of course."

"I am not so sure of that."

"Why not?"

"Well, for one thing, he has suddenly become a very rich man. He will feel his oats as much as a four-year-old colt. He may think the idea is utterly beneath him. When you have been with him half an hour, or less, excuse yourself for a moment, and come out of the room. I will return there in your place."

"I thought it was the idea that he should not know you were at home."

"He won't know the difference, Chick."

"Oh; I see. You are going to make up like me, eh? It is a long time since you did that."

"I know. But I can do it while you are receiving him. Go down, now, so as to be at the door when he arrives. I'll follow along as soon as I have fixed myself up."

"There is another suit of clothes exactly like this one I am wearing, in my——"

"I know it. Go ahead."

Those who are familiar with the Nick Carter histories know that it not infrequently occurred that Nick Carter and Chick made themselves up to represent each other. There were times when both of them represented Nick, and times when they both represented Chick. They had studied and practiced this bit of masquerading for years, until they had acquired it to perfection.

If Nick Carter wished to leave the city, and did not desire that others should know that he was out of town, Chick made himself up as Nick and remained in town, being seen on the streets and elsewhere in that guise.

And if Nick wished to go anywhere, and did not care to have it understood that he was there in person, he pretended to send his first assistant, and made himself up in that character perfectly.

After Chick left the room now, it did not take the detective long to make the necessary alterations in his appearance; and presently he descended the stairs and entered by a narrow door, a cubby-hole of a room that was now rarely used.

It was really a closet place, next to the reception room, from the interior of which he could both see and hear all that took place there.

Sylvester Coddington had just been announced when Nick took his place, and he was therefore cognizant of the very first remark that passed between the caller and Chick.

"It's really odd, you know," Sylvester Coddington said, as he seated himself upon the chair that Chick indicated, "that you should have telephoned me just as you did. My car was at the door, and I was just on the point of starting for this house."

"Indeed?" said Chick. "Why was that?"

"I was coming on the very subject you mentioned; but I supposed that Mr. Carter was at home."

"Did you have something to suggest about the escape of Jeanne Coudert?"

"No; I had something to tell Nick Carter, though."

"What was it?"

"I suppose I can talk with you the same as if it were with him in person, eh?"

"Certainly. When he is absent, I am in full charge, with all his authority."

"That's fine. He must have great confidence in you."

"He has, I am glad to say. Now, what was it that you wished to tell him?"

"Well, it's an odd thing, to be sure, and seems hardly creditable; but it is true, just the same."

"What is it?"

"I am positive that I saw Mademoiselle Coudert, after her escape, last night; only, if—if there was no mistake—if I did see her in person, she was no more ill than I am."

"I don't think she has been ill at all. It is apparent, now, that she has faked the whole thing, helped along by the doctor who pronounced her dead, last night. But, of course, this suspicion of mine is not established, and you are not supposed to repeat it."

"Certainly not. But I say, it was clever of her; eh?"

"Very."

"And she must have bribed that doctor good, and plenty, to induce him to throw up his whole career like that; eh?"

"Perhaps he won't throw it up; and perhaps she bribed him with something that is not counted in dollars and cents," said Chick.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, you have seen Jeanne Coudert; you know how beautiful and bewitching she is; put yourself in that doctor's place and imagine her making love to you—or, better still, permitting you to make love to her; eh?"

"Aw, come now; I'd be proof against that sort of thing, you know. She couldn't pull the wool over my eyes like that. She may be beautiful, but you see, I know who she is, and what she is."

"So did that doctor."

"All the same, she couldn't twist me around her little finger the way you say she did with him."

"You seem to be quite sure of that, and I am glad of it; so we will let it rest. But you have not, as yet, told me how it happened that you saw her, or thought you saw her, last night, after she escaped."

"Well, of course, I only thought I saw her, until

I read that account in the paper of the way she got out of the hospital; but now I am sure it was she."

"No doubt. Tell me about it."

"Well, I had been at the house of a friend over in Brooklyn—we had had a little, quiet poker party, you know—and was on my way home. I came by the subway, and I got out of the train at Fourteenth Street, to change to a local. See?"

"Yes."

"There wasn't a local in sight, and I looked at my watch. It was exactly five minutes after midnight."

"Go on, Mr. Coddington."

"I happened to look across the tracks toward the downtown platform, and there, facing me, with her veil drawn aside, evidently so I should see and recognize her if I looked up at all, and smiling at me to beat the band, was the woman, Jeanne Coudert, for I ever saw her. I confess that it startled me, for I knew where she was supposed to be; and I was on the point of calling out to her, or of running around to that other platform to get a nearer view, when a downtown train—an express—pulled in, and I saw her step aboard of it. And—would you believe it—she actually waved her hand at me as the front car rushed past her and hid her from view."

"There is no doubt, then, that she recognized you, is there?"

"I should say not."

"And that would be about the time she might have reached that station, by a local, if she made her escape at the time supposed. Was she alone?"

"Upon my life I couldn't say as to that. There were several people near her, and one or more of them might have been with her, for all I know."

"Did you see her speak to any one, or any one speak to her?"

"No; I am certain as to that much."

"Could you see her after she entered the train?"

"Only just as she stepped upon it. It must have been through a window. It was then that she waved her hand at me a second time."

"I wonder why she wished to attract your attention just then?" said Chick.

"I haven't an idea, really."

"Well, I have."

"What was it? What do you suppose it was?"

"Why, she meant to notify you that she is still after those millions you have inherited—and that she means to get them, too."

CHAPTER IV.

ENGAGING A STOOL PIGEON.

During fully half a minute after Chick made the remark that Jeanne was after Coddington's millions, that person simply stared at his vis-à-vis; then he laughed outright.

"That is absurd," he said; and laughed again.

"It may not be absurd as you believe," retorted Chick.

"Oh, well, come now; how in the world would she get them?"

"I expect the answer to that question would be up to you, Coddington."

"Up to me? How so?"

"Well, she made a pretty good play for those millions once upon a time; didn't she?"

"She certainly did. I can't deny that."

"And she came pretty near to getting them, too, didn't she?"

"She sure did."

"I think she would have succeeded if it hadn't been for Nick Carter. Don't you?"

"Surest thing you know."

"Well, that business with the forged will is all past and gone, now; no such scheme as that one can be worked again."

"I should hope not."

"But you have got the millions, Coddington."

"That is about the size of it. What are you getting at, anyway?"

"This: In order to get them now, she has got to get you first."

"Get—me—first?"

"That is what I said."

"I cannot even pretend to understand you."

"The same way she got that doctor."

"Oh; I see. That is what you mean, is it?"

"Yes."

"It seems to me that it suggests the old story about cooking a rabbit; eh?"

"Perhaps; but some rabbits are easy to catch."

"Meaning me?"

"If you choose to take it so. But, really, Coddington, I have only said all this to warn you against her. I think that she will not give up the idea of possessing herself of the Coddington millions without another struggle; without at least another attempt; and the next time she makes one, it will be much more subtle than the last effort."

"I told you a little while ago that she couldn't pull

the wool over my eyes, even if she had a chance; and I meant it. And, besides, how is she to get an opportunity?"

"She will make one."

"You stand a whole lot more in awe of her than I do."

"That is, perhaps, because I know her better."

"Oh, bosh! Why did you send for me to come here?"

"To tell you what I have told you; to warn you."

"Bosh again."

"All right. Take it so, if you like. Now, I want you to excuse me for a moment. I will return at once."

"Perhaps I had better be going."

"No; wait a moment. There is something more that I wish to say to you. I think it very likely that I may propose something to you."

"All right. I'll wait."

Chick left the room, and, as he did so, Nick went out of the closet behind the room; and so they literally exchanged places, Chick taking Nick's place in the closet, and Nick—an exact counterpart of Chick—presently reëntering the reception room where Sylvester Coddington was waiting.

Modulating his voice to a key which he and Chick always used when they were representing the same characters, Nick took the seat that had been vacated by Chick.

"Well," he said, as if he were the same person who had just gone out of the room, "have you thought over all that I said to you?"

"It really isn't worth thinking over," was the reply. "I do not fear the woman; not in the least."

"Coddington, do you really think that you would be proof against her wiles, if she should try them upon you?"

"I am sure of it."

"Then, in that case, you will not be disinclined to help me a little in recapturing her, will you?"

"I shall be glad to do so, of course, if I can; but I fail to see——"

"Naturally. You would not see it at all, unless it was explained to you; and there may be no opportunity to put you to the test I have decided upon. That remains with the woman herself."

"Eh? How so?"

"I am speaking to you very seriously, now."

"I certainly hope so."

"Then listen: The whole career of Jeanne Coudert points to one characteristic, more than to any other,

and that one is what an old schoolmaster I once knew used to call by the expressive name of stick-to-it-iveness. Tenacity, in other words."

Coddington nodded.

"She doesn't like to acknowledge herself beaten; and so far she has been beaten in every effort she has made in this country."

"Yes."

"If you will stop to recall some of the circumstances of the past, you will agree with me that she would ultimately have married your cousin, Sam Coddington, if it had not been for the accident that took him back to his own house the night that Vera, his wife, was killed."

"I have sometimes thought that, myself."

"There isn't a doubt of it. But she was not wedded to that idea so firmly but that she was prepared to abandon it if such a thing became necessary. There was the forged will already prepared, as you know."

"Yes."

"But things worked against her, and she lost out. Now, there remains just one more thing that she can do, and, if I read her correctly—if I have read her correctly in the past—she will find a way, or make a way, to do that very thing."

"And that thing, you say, is——"

"That thing is to win you, first."

"It is preposterous, of course."

"It may be so; I hope it is so. And that brings me to the point upon which, if the circumstance should arise, you can be of assistance in her recapture."

"Well, what is it?"

"Coddington, I am convinced that Jeanne Coudert will approach you in some manner. I do not know, and I cannot anticipate, how she will do it—or when. She may introduce herself to your notice a week hence, or a month hence, or a year hence; I cannot even guess as to that; but I am satisfied that she will make the attempt."

"Go on. I begin to see what you are getting at, I think."

"Of course you do. The point is this: If she does approach you at all, it will be done with extreme caution, at first."

"Naturally."

"She will leave plenty of room open behind her to retreat in safety, if she finds that you are disposed to betray her."

"As I should do instantly."

"And that is precisely what I do not want you to do, Coddington."

"Eh? Why not?"

"Because, if she does that thing, she will have arranged her way of escape from it so thoroughly that we could not hope to capture her if you did betray her. She will naturally look for betrayal, at first, and will be thoroughly prepared for it."

"You said that before. Well, what do you want me to do, then?"

"To pretend to see it in her way; I want you to be prepared to let her think that you are going to be an easy mark for her. Understand?"

"Make love to her, and all that sort of thing?"

"If she invites it—yes."

"It seems to me as if we were counting chickens; eh?"

"Perhaps so. In reality we are only preparing for an emergency that may arise."

"Oh, well, I will do my part if it should arise, although I don't in the least see how it can do so. Why, the woman must know that, in the light of all that has happened in the past, I would lose no time in denouncing her if she should come under my notice."

"She will doubtless take that chance. What you told here about seeing her last night, and about her smiling and waving her hand at you, convinces me that I am not far wrong."

"What is your idea of her method of approach to me?"

"I haven't any. She may do it just as she is, without attempting any change in her appearance or personality; and she may get herself introduced to your notice under some form of disguise."

"Do you suppose I wouldn't know her at once, if such a thing as that should happen?"

"I am depending upon it that you would know her."

"You bet your life I would."

"Well and good; then there is still another form of approach, and it would be like her to attempt it at first. If she should, I want you to fall for it."

"What is it?"

"To work out some plan of appealing to your honor, your manliness, your pity, or your sympathy. To represent herself as a woman who has been more sinned against than sinning. She is a perfect actress, among many other qualities that she possesses."

"I have heard as much."

"Whatever happens, if she should approach you, meet her, not exactly halfway, but with a certain implied reluctance to draw away from her. Do you understand?"

"I think so."

"Just now she is hiding away, and I suspect that she has selected a place where there is no hope of finding her; and that she has gone to it by such a roundabout method that she could not be trailed to it. But, after a while, when she thinks that she is comparatively safe, she will come out of her hiding place, and she will make herself known—in some manner—to you."

"All right. If she does, let her look out."

"Coddington, there are only two persons, just now, who can be used by me to find her, and those two persons are yourself and that doctor; and, so far as he is concerned, I suspect that he is already out of the counting. But I shall see him presently, and talk with him, and I will know more about him after that. Now, keep me informed, by telephone, of everything that is at all unusual that happens to you, no matter whether you think it may be associated with Jeanne Coudert or not."

"I will do so," Coddington agreed, and he took his leave.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE TOILS OF A SIREN.

Coddington had been gone from the house less than half an hour, and Nick Carter had consumed only half of the cigar he had lighted, when Joseph entered the study to announce that Patsy had returned, accompanied by a gentleman whose name was Doctor Kregoff, whom he had taken into the reception room.

"Tell Patsy to bring the gentleman here, to the study," was the detective's order; then he turned to Chick, who was with him.

"Chick," he said, "I am going to ask you to wait outside the house until Kregoff leaves here, and then to take his trail. Not so much because I care a jot where he goes, but because, since I sent Patsy after him, I have got a notion that I put this doctor in jeopardy by doing it."

"How so?"

"Jeanne would be likely to have some of her followers keep tabs on Kregoff, for a time; and if she finds out that he has been here to see me it won't be well for him. She would think that he came of his own volition, probably, and she might—well, she might hurt him, or have him hurt. I don't want him murdered, just now. It will be your job to see that it does not happen."

"Oh; all right."

Five minutes later Patsy conducted the young doctor into the study, and, upon a signal from his chief, departed and left him there.

There had been no form of introduction, and Kregoff stood where Patsy had left him, staring at the detective, until the latter spoke to him in a kindly tone of voice.

"You are Doctor Kregoff, I suppose?" he said.

"Yes. I am Doctor Kregoff; at least, I was—that is——"

"I understand. You are a trifle unnerved to-day; is it not so?"

"Indeed I am. Everybody suspects me of——" he stopped again.

"I know. There is very good reason to suspect you, isn't there?"

"From one viewpoint, there is, yes." He was beginning to regain his nerve, now.

"By the way, you know who I am, do you not?"

"I was told that Nick Carter had sent for me; I suppose you are the detective by that name."

"That is quite correct. Now, doctor, I want to know—I want you to tell me—just what promises Jeanne Coudert made to you in order to induce you to——"

"Ah; and you will charge me with that, too, will you?"

"I do not charge you with it; I know it to be true; for the very good reason that the incident that happened at the hospital could not have happened at all without your active connivance and participation. Will you be quite frank with me, or shall I place you under arrest at once, and send you to prison for assisting in the escape of a prisoner who is charged and indicted for having committed a capital crime?"

The question was asked calmly, and it was the very calmness of it that told.

The doctor remained silent a long time, and Nick waited; but at last, when the silence continued, the detective spoke again.

"I will not affront you by considering that you fell before an ordinary bribe, doctor," he said. "You are not the man to have done that. Money, or the value of money, would not have influenced you; but there is another thing that might have done so."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I refer to the wiles of a beautiful woman. You were in the toils of a siren of the most pronounced type; you were under the direct influence of a woman

who, I have no doubt, adds hypnotic power to her other great gifts. You fell. You deceived the other members of the staff at the hospital; you deceived the nurses and the orderlies, and those whom you could not deceive, you bought. It is so, isn't it? I know it is so, doctor."

The doctor hung his head, and was silent.

"And you did it all," the detective went on mercilessly, but still in the same low and even, and withal kindly tone, "because she asked you to."

"Because she asked me to," the doctor repeated after him, in an expressionless voice.

"Exactly. She told you that she could love you; or would love you, or did already love you; she let you tell her that you loved her, worshiped her, idolized her; that you would consider the world well lost, if in losing it you gained her. Is it not so?"

"Yes, yes; oh, yes. I may as well admit it now as another time."

"Exactly. By admitting it, and by telling me all that you know about it, and her, you will escape prison. By denying it, you will go to prison. I do not mean that so much as a threat as an argument."

"I understand."

"And, doctor, if I can make you see the enormity of the sin you have committed; if I can make you understand that that woman was merely using you; that she did not care for you at all, and never would; that she will not keep a single promise that she made to you—if I can make you realize all that, possibly I can induce you to assist us in recapturing the woman who has spoiled your life, and your career."

"No, no, no; not that."

"You would not betray her, even now, if you could do so?"

"No. I have been a fool, perhaps; let me take the consequences."

"You will not assist in her recapture?"

"No. Under no circumstances. No, I will not do that."

"Well, I won't deny that I rather like you for that answer, and I think we can do without you. But you will not refuse to tell me all about the arrangements you made with her; or, rather, the arrangements that she made with you?"

"I will tell you about them, so far as they personally concern me; I will not permit myself to say anything against her."

"As you will. Tell me all you are willing to tell."

"When mademoiselle was taken to the hospital, she

was placed directly under my care. In making the first examination of her condition, I discovered that she had taken a very large dose of a new and a little-known drug that is named zellodion."

"I have never heard of it," said Nick.

"There are many physicians who have not; indeed there are few who know it by more than the mere name, and its action is not understood by any of us, as yet; not entirely."

"Go on, please."

"It was discovered and compounded by a great physician whom I once met in Paris—a certain Doctor Quartz——"

"Ah, yes. Well?"

"It was through him that I first heard of the drug at all, and he taught me a great deal concerning its uses and effects. It was the memory of that time which determined me in the idea that Mademoiselle Coudert had swallowed a large dose of that drug. And right here, Mr. Carter, I can offer you the first and the only excuse for my fall."

"Well? What is it?"

"I was jealous of my knowledge of that drug. I preferred, at the start, not to let the others—that is, the other doctors—know what I knew. I wanted to surprise them later."

"I understand you."

"I therefore concealed the fact of my discovery. One of the effects of the drug is to produce partial coma in the patient, and the physical aspect of it is so perfect as to deceive the most learned of men."

"I see."

"Therefore it is no reflection upon the other doctors there that they gave the opinion they did give concerning the condition of Mademoiselle Coudert. They could not have done otherwise under the circumstances."

"Very well. So much for them; but I am not interested in their professional characters. Go on, please."

"I knew the duration of the effects of the drug, when taken in large doses, to be approximately five days. She remained in the state she was in more than six days, and during that time I watched over her with great care; so constantly, in fact, that it was remarked upon by the doctors and nurses; who said that I was smitten with the pretty face, and who have since used that against me."

"I can understand that."

"But, in reality, I was thinking only of my science; in reality, I was watching closely for the first sign of the disappearance of the effect of the drug."

"Which appeared the sixth day. Go on."

"Which appeared at the beginning of the seventh day; and that beginning of the seventh day happened to occur at night, when I was entirely alone with the patient."

"I understand. She opened her eyes to consciousness, then."

"Yes; and she smiled up at me, and I fell. I bent down over her, and she raised her arms until she locked her hands together behind my neck, and drew me down close to her, and she whispered, with her lips against my ear so that I shuddered, that she begged me not to betray her; and then, as if she knew what had held me silent all that time, she added that she would tell me all about the drug, and that I should be greater than all the other doctors in the city."

"She begged me to let it appear that she was still in the condition that had been produced upon her by the drug—and I agreed."

"You could not withstand her pleadings, doctor."

"No. I could not."

"And then, at that time, it was more her personality than your science that influenced you, was it not?"

"Oh, yes; there is no use denying that, Mr. Carter."

"And after that——"

"After that I was drawn under the spell of the woman in her. I was uneasy when I was not in her presence, and was all the time eager to return to her. There was a screen around her bed, hiding it from view, and I used to sit there beside her, holding her hand, and—I will not deny it now—worshipping her."

"And then, by degrees, I suppose, the subject of her escape came up?"

"Yes; I am not even sure who suggested it first; whether she did it, or I. At all events, I perfected the plans, and saw to it that they were carried out. I was as wax in her hands, Mr. Carter, and I would be so again, if she were here, now. I do not know even how I find the courage to tell you all this about her."

"How did she get away from the hospital?"

"I attended to that. I secured clothing for her. I took it to her. I dosed the other patients in that room with sleeping powders. I sent a nurse here, and an orderly there, to get them out of the way. The clothing I had secured for Jeanne was the uniform of a nurse, and she had no difficulty in going down the stairs to the ground floor, and then, by watching her opportunity, to slip out unseen."

"And that reporter? What of him?"

"I needed a witness—a disinterested person who could swear that he had seen her dead body. He was just the one for that, for he would not examine too closely. She held her breath while I pulled the sheet back from her face, and I quickly replaced it. That is all there was to that, Mr. Carter."

"You knew, then, when you took the three doctors to that room, that she had gone?"

"Of course I knew that. I had assisted her in leaving the building."

CHAPTER VI.

NICK CARTER GIVES WARNING.

"When was the last time you saw her, doctor?" the detective asked.

"When she passed out upon the street, last night."

"But you were to see her again, and soon?"

"Yes."

"When, where, and how?"

"This morning I was to be in the waiting room of the South Ferry, on the New York side, and she was to send for me."

"Were you there?"

"Yes."

"She did not send for you?"

"No; but I have thought—I have decided that it was impossible for her to do so; that she could not come, as she agreed, or rather send."

"But all the while you know, in your heart, do you not, that she never intended to keep that appointment, or to send for you?"

"Oh, don't say that. No; I do not know it. I believe that she will send for me, yet."

"How? Where?"

"She has my address. She knows where I live. It was understood between us that if anything should happen that I could not be at the trysting place at the appointed time she was to write to me there. I will hear from her."

"She did not tell you where she was going, when she left the hospital?"

"She did not know."

"She did not know where she was going, and she left the hospital alone, at that time in the night?"

"I had provided her with money. She said she would find a lodging somewhere; and she did speak of going to Brooklyn, to somebody there whom she knows. Also, she referred to an acquaintance in the

Bronx, and another over in Jersey. She might have gone to any of them."

"Yes. She might. Now, at any time when you were arranging for her escape, did you communicate with any person outside the hospital, at her request?"

"No."

"Nor mail a letter for her?"

"Yes; one."

"When was that?"

"The day before yesterday."

"After you had agreed upon the time when she was to make her escape?"

"Yes."

"To whom was the letter addressed?"

"To herself."

"What is that?"

"It was addressed to herself, at the general post office, marked transient."

"Did she tell you why it was so addressed, or anything at all about the letter?"

"She said that a woman friend of hers would call at the post office and ask for it; and when I asked her how that friend would know when to call there she replied that it had been agreed that her friend would call for a letter Wednesday of each week until she escaped from the hospital. The following day was Wednesday, so the letter was doubtless delivered."

"Have you any idea of the contents of the letter?"

"I read it; all of it. She showed it to me, and asked me to read it."

"Can you remember what it contained?"

"Word for word. There was no superscription. It was like this: 'I shall leave here very soon now, through the offices of a good friend to whom I owe much, and will owe more. I will be free. I will meet you at the appointed place, one week from to-morrow night, at midnight. Don't fail me. Jeanne.' That was all."

"And were you so transparent that you did not understand that the expression 'one week from to-morrow night, at midnight,' in reality meant 'to-morrow night, at midnight'?"

"I never thought of that."

"Don't you realize, doctor, that you have been used? That now, your usefulness being over, you will be thrown aside as carelessly as the peel from an orange that has been eaten?"

The doctor hung his head without replying.

"Don't you realize still more than that?"

"What more?"

"That now, since you have come to this house to talk with me, your very life is in imminent danger?"

"Danger from what? Danger from whom?"

"Danger from that woman who is thrice a murderess, at least, and who is even more guilty than that. And you knew her to be a murderess when you gave your consent to assist her. You knew that you were assisting a criminal to escape. You knew——"

"Wait a moment, Mr. Carter. I did know that she was charged with such a crime, and would be tried for it, but she swore to me that her cousin killed herself, and I believed her."

"Poor fool!"

"Oh, I know; I know."

"My only fear, doctor, is that you will be her next victim."

"I? Oh, no; impossible."

"You are now in her way. She knows that she has made you love her; and she has had experience with men in love. She knows that they become dangerous, once they are certain that they have been deceived. She does not know what you may do now, save only for one thing, and that she is sure you will do."

"What is that?"

"Seek her."

"Yes. That is so. I shall seek her until I find her, if it takes all the rest of my life."

"She is aware of that—and she does not want to be sought too much, just now."

"I would not harm her, even if I found her."

"Wait a moment, and let us see if you would not. Suppose you found her, and she should laugh at you—as she would do—and should call you what I just now called you, a poor fool? Suppose she should treat you with loathing and contempt—as she would do—would you not harm her then?"

"I would—— Oh, my God! What would I not do to her?"

"That is it—and she knows it. You are not the first, nor the tenth, nor the hundredth man whom she has deceived and fooled. She practices her wiles upon every man who stands for the briefest moment between her and the object of her desires for the moment. They all fall, as you fell. You are only a circumstance."

"What you say hurts, Mr. Carter."

"It ought to hurt. You have ruined your life, spoiled your career; and for what? For a few smiles from a woman who is a criminal. For a woman who has unsexed herself time after time, but who happens

to possess the fatal gift of beauty. I am going to let you go from here, now, but I wish, in going, you would agree to follow some advice I shall give you."

"What is it?"

"The first is, do not return to your house, where, you have a room, and sleep."

"Ah; but I must do that. There is—there is——"

"There is the hope that you will find there a message from Jeanne. Is that what was on your mind?"

"Yes. It is."

"Well, the hope would be blasted; and even if there were a message it would be there only for the purpose of luring you into another trap. You are in her way, now, since you have been here, in my house."

"But why do you want me not to go there?"

"I want you to leave the country; to get away from New York before you become a permanent resident of one of the near-by cemeteries. If you haven't money enough to go away, I will loan it to you."

"I have money."

"Then take my advice and go away."

"After I return to my rooms. There is clothing there, and books, and instruments, and——"

"There is nothing there which you are not capable of doing without, save that one possibility of a message from Jeanne Coudert."

"Very well. I will admit it. But I will not go until I have made certain that there is no message for me by to-morrow morning. I had decided to wait till then, and then to go away, anyhow."

"No. You had decided to start out on a search for her. You had——"

"I had decided to post another letter, addressed to her, at the general post office, and to mark it transient; and then to stand on watch until somebody called there and asked for such a letter."

"Do you think that another one would be expected?"

"Why not? Would Wednesday be the only day when such a letter would be called for? Is it likely that the person who called for that letter is, or was, the only person in the city to whom she might have occasion to write?"

"But, man alive, the whole city is just now ringing with the name of Jeanne Coudert. If you should appear at the general-delivery window of the post office, and ask for a letter addressed to her, you would not walk a block away from the building before you would be placed under arrest."

"I had not thought of that."

"And then there would be proof enough that you

had assisted her to escape. You would go to prison, and that is just what she would be delighted to have happen to you. It would spare her the trouble of putting you out of the way in another manner."

"But you can send me to prison, as it is, Mr. Carter."

"I could; but I have no intention of doing so. You have suffered enough; and sending you there would not assist in the recapture of Jeanne. All the same, I am not at all sure that it would not be a good idea to have you locked up in the Tombs for a time."

"Why?"

"To save your life. It is in danger just now."

"Bah! I don't believe it."

"Well, there are some people in the world who will not profit by expert advice, and you seem to be one of them. Go your way, doctor. I am sorry for you, but I don't see that I can do anything for you. If I were sure that your life was in danger, I should detain you; but, as it is only an opinion on my part, I must let you go."

"I thank you for all your kindnesses, Mr. Carter."

"Doctor, if you are alive and able to do so, come to me again in a week. I should like to have another talk with you, under such circumstances."

"I will do so."

"Very good! And now, it is still daylight. You will not be in danger before night; but guard yourself well, then, wherever you are. Heed what I say. You are in the way of a dangerous woman. Beware of her."

Doctor Kregoff bowed, took his hat, and went his way—to what fate was not yet determined.

CHAPTER VII.

NICK CARTER AS A HUMAN TERROR.

There is a French café in South Fifth Avenue, in the city of New York, to which a certain class of Frenchmen, on arriving in the city, naturally gravitate.

Doubtless they are sent to it by friends on the other side, who have visited this country, or who have friends who have done so, for it is not possible that they discover it by instinct. Nevertheless, they are sure to go there, even if they do not decide to remain. It is a sort of natural rendezvous for them.

True, there are many other French quarters in the city, but the one mentioned is the oldest one of them all, and to it they go, if only for a moment, or an hour, or a day.

When darkness had fallen that night, Nick Carter left his house alone and directed his way to that particular café; and he was made up for the part he intended to play.

Those who have followed the adventures of Nick Carter know that he has spent much time in Paris, and that he speaks French—even the French slang, and the almost untranslatable jargon of the "Apaches" perfectly.

Therefore it was not difficult for him to carry out the part he had determined to play; the only danger would consist in his playing it too well, and getting caught for that reason.

But we will follow him as he went there, after first taking a look at his make-up, for that was a masterly effort.

You see, he knew that if he was right in his conjecture that he would find there, in all probability, one or more of the followers of Jeanne Coudert—or at least one or more persons who knew more or less about her—it behooved him to be prepared to withstand all suspicion that might, by any chance, be directed against him.

It was for that reason that he worked his disguise from the ground up, so to speak.

He began at his home by preparing a bath, into which he plunged and remained for a definite number of minutes; and when he emerged he did not dry himself with a towel, as would be the usual case, but walked around the room until evaporation made him dry; and then, if you had been a spectator, you would have seen that the skin of his entire body was perceptibly darkened.

And then he arrayed himself in underclothing of French manufacture—such clothing as the class of man he was to represent would buy and wear; and he continued that idea to the completion of his costume.

He did not use a wig, but he darkened his hair to the required shade; he used a bit of parchment with which he manufactured a diagonal scar that extended, when completed, diagonally across his forehead, from a point directly above the left temple, to the extremity of his right eyebrow.

He installed a small "plomper" inside of each cheek, filling them out and entirely altering the contour of his face; he arranged a second small scar, which drooped from the corner of his mouth on the right side, and although it was less than an inch in extent it lent to the general expression a peculiarly sinister look; he did not attempt such things as a false mustache,

or imperial, for the reason that he felt that he could not afford to wear anything which could be pulled off or dislodged, no matter what might happen to him.

A low, flat-crowned stiff hat, with a straight brim, was worn pulled down over the right side of his head so that it concealed the scar that has been mentioned; a low, turn-down collar, a flashy red tie, into which a huge horseshoe pin had been stuck; a heavy watch chain, bedecked with seals and charms; a rattan cane, a cutaway coat of brown plush, a fancy vest, striped trousers that fitted tightly, and high-heeled shoes completed the outfit.

It was a disguise that Nick Carter had worn often enough before, but, as it happened, never in his own country; but he had, on several occasions, adopted it in Paris, and fortunately it had never been discovered there that he was not what he seemed when he was so arrayed.

For the character, even to the shape and expression of the face, represented one man who was thoroughly well known to the darker side of Parisian life—a leader among the Apaches—and in Paris that word does not mean what it does in this country.

Just where they got the term, nobody knows.

Here, when we speak of the Apaches, we refer to a tribe of Indians which for many years almost defied the government of the United States; a tribe that for cruelty and ferociousness carried off the palm of everything that has been known along our borders.

But there, in Paris, the word refers to a criminal of the worst class.

Not a society, be it understood, but to a set of men and women who prey upon their fellow men, who hang together through all difficulties, and who do not hesitate at the commission of every crime that can be mentioned.

We have nothing in this country which is a counterpart of it, or which even approaches that class in the wrongdoings of the underworld; and one has to come into contact with the Apaches of Paris to understand what they are.

Always there is one or more celebrated characters among them; celebrated, not only in and among their own ranks, but all over the city, and among the police as well.

It is not very long since one of them became the terror of all officialdom in the French capital by wearing bound to his arms under his sleeves, and to his legs as well, leather armlets and leglets that were spiked with steel, so that, when the man was seized by an offi-

cer, the officer's hands would be horribly torn and mangled, and the wearer of that unique armor would get away with ease, and go scot-free.

Well, among that class in Paris was one notorious character who was known by the name of Bras de Fer—which means Ironarm, and the very strangeness of that particular character rendered the name and the disguise peculiarly adaptable for Nick Carter's uses.

Nothing was known about Bras de Fer, even among the Apaches of Paris themselves, save only that he came and went at will, appearing and disappearing among them whenever it was his desire to do so; sometimes being absent from their haunts for months at a time, and again being seen constantly for a time among them.

All that they did know about him was that he was a terrible man, and one whom it was exceedingly dangerous to cross.

He would strike another man down upon the slightest provocation; he feared nobody, nor anything; he had many times utterly routed squads of policemen who had been sent to capture him, and the list of crimes with which he was charged was long indeed—whereas, the list of crimes that he had committed that were not known to the police was doubtless a great deal longer, and much worse from every point of view.

Bras de Fer was known by sight among the Apaches of Paris; he would, therefore, be as well known among those same Apaches who had been driven away from their own city, and who had found a temporary hiding place in New York.

It was for that reason that Nick Carter made himself up in that character.

He knew that, at least, the proprietor of the place he proposed to visit that night would recognize in the man who would enter his place the dreaded Bras de Fer.

And he also knew, of course, that the said proprietor would lose no time in notifying his patrons—or such as did not know the man themselves—that Bras de Fer was among them.

The reader will understand just what a dangerous task it might prove to be for Nick Carter to attempt the part of Bras de Fer.

The only saving clause in the whole thing was the known surliness, taciturnity, and strangeness of the man.

For one thing, it was never safe to address him at all, unless he spoke first, and any one of his class who ventured to do so was as apt to receive a blow or a

knife thrust in reply as he was to get an answer to his question, if he asked one; or a response to his statement, if it were not a question.

Nick timed his arrival at the hour when it was likely that the tables of the café would be filled; and he opened the door—it was a half-basement place—and entered the smoke-filled room with a swagger that any person who knew Bras de Fer by sight would have recognized instantly.

A babel of voices filled the long and narrow room when he entered and closed the door behind him; and as he closed it he remained standing just inside, boldly scanning the occupants of each table, down one side of the room and up the other side, and thence traveling through the centre of it.

At first, a few of the voices ceased; then others; then a hush fell upon the room, save only at one of the round tables which were arranged along the middle of the room.

That particular table was occupied by five young French-Americans who were out for a "good time," who were "doing the town," and who did not by any stretch of the imagination belong with the class that frequented the place.

They did not cease their laughter and conversation, when the supposed Bras de Fer entered the room and paused just inside the door to survey it.

But they did presently realize that a hush had fallen upon the other patrons of the place, and all of them turned toward the door to discover the cause.

They saw the man standing there, but they did not in the least comprehend who he was—or, at least, whom the other guests supposed him to be; and one of them made the mistake of pointing a finger at the figure near the door, thus calling the attention of his companions to the man, and then laughing aloud.

A gasp went the rounds of the place at this, for there were many there who believed they had recognized the man near the door, and to the others who had not, the whispered word had been passed mentioning that dreaded name.

Nothing could have happened better to suit Nick Carter's purposes than that incident.

It afforded him the opportunity of filling out the character he was playing.

He started forward swiftly toward the table where the objectionable youngsters were seated, while the spectators held their breath and waited.

Nick seized the young man who had laughed at him by the collar—he took good care not to hurt him, of

course, but nevertheless to give the appearance of doing so—and dragged him from his chair to his feet; and then he sent him spinning the length of the room toward the door, snarling out in the Apache-French slang:

"Out with you, you and your laughter!"

Without deigning to watch the effect of what he had done, and without waiting to give the other four young men time to recover from their amazement, he seized upon two of them and sent them spinning after their companion—and the remaining two were propelled toward the door in the same manner before they could do aught to resist the attack.

And then, as Nick calmly seated himself in one of the vacated chairs, not so much as turning about to witness the effect of what he had done, the proprietor of the place rushed from behind his desk at the end of the bar, and half forced, half persuaded the five young men to leave the place without delay.

He even told them that they owed him nothing for the entertainment they had already received; that he would cheerfully call it off if they would only go; and they went—after the proprietor had whispered to them the name of the dreaded man whom they had affronted.

And Nick, seated at the vacated table, did not raise his eyes, but appeared to be brooding over what had happened; and it was not until the door had closed behind the five who had offended the dreaded Bras de Fer that he raised his head, caught the eye of the proprietor, and beckoned to him.

And that was the manner in which Bras de Fer—otherwise Nick Carter—began his real search for Jeanne Coudert.

CHAPTER VIII.

PLAYING A DANGEROUS GAME.

The proprietor of the café came forward tremblingly.

Already there had been sufficient disturbance in his place, and he did not want more; and of course he did not dare to refuse the command of that terrible man, Bras de Fer.

It was unthinkable that Bras de Fer should be in America at all; and yet, there he was; there could be no mistake, for Monsieur Gaudet had seen him often enough in Paris, before he, himself, emigrated to the United States.

Once before Bras de Fer had visited America, he remembered, and that had been a terrible time indeed, while it lasted. He did not wish for a repetition of it.

He approached the detective, bowing and smirking; he did not dare to mention the name of this unbidden guest, in welcoming him, for he did not yet know what attitude the awful man might assume, and it might be that Bras de Fer would prefer that his name should not be uttered.

"Monsieur summoned me," he said in French. "What is monsieur's pleasure?"

"I have disturbed your guests, Monsieur Gaudet," replied Nick roughly. "It is to be regretted that it was necessary. You dismissed those unpleasant people without asking them to pay their score, and, therefore, I wish to settle the amount."

"But, monsieur, it is not——"

"La, la, man, The score, I tell you," Nick interrupted him. "And, wait a moment."

"Oui, monsieur. With pleasure. I am at monsieur's commands."

"I will also ask all who are present to drink to the health of Monsieur Gaudet—yourself."

"Ah, monsieur, the honor——"

"You heard me?"

"Yes, monsieur, yes. Pardon me. A request from monsieur is a command. The orders shall be taken at once, and the score of the young gentlemen shall be brought to monsieur."

"Those youngmen do not belong here, Gaudet."

"No, monsieur; but they are harmless young persons, out for a good time."

"They insulted me."

"Ah, yes, monsieur; but not intentionally. They did not know who——"

"Well? Monsieur—who?"

"I have forgotten, monsieur, what I was about to say."

"It is well. Take the orders and then return here. I would talk with you: You have not forgotten me, Gaudet?"

"Not if monsieur wishes me to remember; otherwise, my memory is bad."

Nick smiled grimly, and the imitation scar at the corner of his mouth made that smile a dreadful thing, to see.

"There are others here in this room who remember me," he said tentatively.

"Monsieur, their memories are like mine. It shall be as monsieur wishes, as to that."

The detective shrugged his shoulders and turned out the palms of his hands.

"It does not matter," he said. "Go; take the orders

now. The person I seek, for whom I have crossed the ocean, is not here. Tell them that; it may make them feel easier. Take the orders, and return to me."

"Yes, monsieur, at once."

The orders were taken, and the proprietor returned to the table where Nick was seated.

"Sit down," said the detective.

"Shall I not first serve monsieur, also?"

"Serve yourself, if you like; for me, nothing."

"Then later I shall have the felicity to drink to the good health of monsieur?"

"As you please—later. Just now I wish to talk with you."

"I am at the service of monsieur."

There was still a hush upon the room, and Nick said impatiently to the proprietor:

"Bid them resume their conversation—to make as much noise as they like. There is more safety in noise than in silence."

Gaudet got upon his feet and announced the wishes of the new guest, and at once conversation was resumed among them; but it lacked that spontaneity that had characterized it when Nick entered the place. Listening, he could tell that much of the gaiety was forced, and he smiled, well pleased with his adventure thus far. There was no doubt that all there believed him to be the dreaded Bras de Fer.

"Now, in what way can I be of service to monsieur?" asked the Frenchman.

Nick bent across the table, nearer to him.

"There is one of our countrywomen here, in this country," he said, in a low tone, so that it could reach no ears but Gaudet's. "Some time ago she was tried for murder, and acquitted; then she was supposed to have taken her own life; later it was discovered that she was not dead, and she was arrested for the murder of a cousin; still later she was sent to a hospital; this morning I discovered that she is no longer at the hospital. I mention no names, but I would find her."

When Nick began to speak so that Gaudet understood what he was saying, Gaudet began to turn pale, and as the statement proceeded his face became chalky; then, as Nick finished the statement he was making—for it was a statement, rather than a question—the proprietor was visibly trembling.

The detective, watching him, knew why he trembled, and he experienced a great deal of satisfaction because he did know.

He knew that if Gaudet had been totally ignorant of the subject that he was asked about he would have

said so at once, without restraint, and therefore the very fact that he did turn pale and tremble was sufficient proof that the man could give the desired information if he could be prevailed upon to do so.

Gaudet knew that it was a dangerous thing to refuse information to Bras de Fer, when that information was as deliberately and specifically asked for as it was now; he also doubtless realized that it might be equally dangerous to betray Jeanne Coudert without her permission to do so.

The man was between two fires, fearing both the persons who menaced him now; but Nick believed that the man stood in greater awe of Bras de Fer than of Jeanne Coudert, and in this belief, as the sequel proved, he was correct.

"Monsieur refers to——" Gaudet began; but Nick interrupted him.

"I mentioned no names; neither need you," he said. "You know to whom I have referred?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Do you know where she can be found?"

"No, monsieur. I——"

"You are lying to me; but never mind, now. What were you about to say?"

"I may be able to ascertain for monsieur."

"Now? At once?"

"Within a short time."

Nick tugged at the heavy chain and drew forth an immense gold watch, which he consulted.

"Within an hour," he said decisively. "I will wait. But you know now where she can be found. Why defer the telling of it?"

"Monsieur will understand me when I say that I have given my pledged word that I do not know? That I have forgotten?" asked Gaudet tremblingly.

"But you did not know, when you gave the promise, that Bras de Fer would ask the question, Gaudet."

"No; Heaven forbid; I did not know. If I had known——"

"Well, what then?"

"I would not have promised."

"So. Well, Gaudet, you are a good fellow. I have no cause for complaint against you, I am glad to say."

"I thank my patron saint for that, monsieur."

"I will, therefore, make it easier for you."

"Ah, monsieur, if you only would consent to do that."

"You desire to be loyal to all your friends, Monsieur Gaudet."

"Indeed I do."

"Then, in that case, you can be loyal to the woman and to Bras de Fer also; and at the same time."

"Ah, monsieur, you are helping me indeed, now."

"You can have a message conveyed to her, from me?"

"Yes, monsieur; or, at least, I will make the effort."

"Very good. I understand you. Tell her this: That Bras de Fer desires to see her at once, or as soon as it can be accomplished. That is all. You will bring the return message to me, here."

"But it cannot be done just now—not this night, monsieur."

"Why not?"

"She is not here."

"And is it far to where she may be found?"

"It is some hours, monsieur; two, at the least."

"Two only? Then send your messenger at once."

"Ah, monsieur! If monsieur would only do me an added favor. I know that monsieur is the most gracious of men when others are in trouble, and I am in great trouble now. It is impossible to serve two masters; and I have sworn the oath of fealty, which forbids me, on pain of death, to tell, or to——"

"Oh, I know all about that, Gaudet. You mean that you cannot send a messenger to her, from this place, now; that there is only a stated manner in which it can be sent, and that the time is not here for it to be done. Is not that what you mean?"

"Monsieur has stated it exactly."

"When, then, could I hope for a reply?"

"To-morrow night, at this hour, and here."

"And it might be that the person of whom we are speaking would deliver the return message in person."

"I had hoped that much, monsieur. If she understands that the great Bras de Fer——"

"I have not given you permission to use my name, Gaudet," interrupted Nick sternly.

"A million pardons, monsieur. If mademoiselle but knows that it is monsieur who desires to see her, I have no doubt that she will respond in person. She is in great need of such assistance as monsieur can bring to her, just now."

"That, Gaudet, is why I am here."

"Ah, I guessed that much, monsieur."

"And there are men here, are there not, who know as much or more about her as you do?"

"Monsieur was always wise," was the cautious reply. "Doubtless he sees more than one face here which he remembers. Would monsieur invite one or more of them to the table with him?"

It was a delicate method of avoiding further questioning; it also suggested an opportunity which Nick had hoped might arise; and therefore he gave his instant consent with a curt nod of his head.

And Gaudet left the table at once, crossing to a table whereat three men were seated.

There was a moment of whispered conversation between them, and then all four started toward the table where the detective was seated.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WEAPON UNDER THE TABLE.

Nick Carter knew perfectly well that the next few minutes would be extremely difficult ones for him.

Three men were approaching him whom he did not in the least know, whom he had never, so far as he was aware, seen before; but, nevertheless, they were men who knew him in the character he was personating, and whom he was expected to know.

There was only one thing to do to meet the emergency, and that was to fall back upon the known taciturnity of Bras de Fer, to remain surly and uncommunicative and noncommittal; at least until he had heard their names mentioned by the others, so he could use them also if the occasion should arise.

Just here was where the known eccentricities of Bras de Fer counted; but nevertheless it was a dangerous moment when those three men, accompanied by the proprietor of the café, seated themselves at the table with Nick.

The others in that room looked around, some with faint shrugs of their shoulders; some with glances of envy that they were not called to the table with the great man; and many with expressions of relief that they had not been so called.

There was no shaking of hands.

Nick did not extend his toward them, and they did not dare to offer theirs until he was the first one to make the advance; but one of them, evidently considering himself the proper one to become spokesman for the others, said:

"Monsieur has done us a great honor to invite us to his table."

"I ask only those who may become my friends," Nick retorted. "Why are you here in this country, when you are so badly wanted in Paris?" he demanded, with a grim smile.

The smile was returned. The man addressed shrugged his shoulders, and threw out his two hands deprecatingly.

"I did not run away," he replied; "I came away at my leisure. My presence was more necessary here than there, monsieur. I would say that if we three—and there are others of us, also, who are not here to-night—can be of service to monsieur, he has only to issue his commands."

"That is well. I thank you all. It is not unlikely that I will call upon you."

"We are entirely at the service of monsieur."

"If the service you offer me so confidently had been devoted to another, whom I could name," said Nick slowly, "it might not be that that other person would now be in such dire difficulties; eh?" he questioned, with a leer, and a drawing down of that corner of his mouth where the scar was located.

"Ah, monsieur, we understand, I think; quite. We were not here in time. We were not sent for soon enough. We did not arrive in time."

"And could you have done anything, if you had arrived in time?" asked the supposed Bras de Fer, with a sneer.

"Much, monsieur, if I may be permitted to say it."

"What, for example?"

"We could have rid our friend, and the world, too, of the cause of all the trouble. Even now, this night, that has been determined upon."

"What has been determined upon?"

"The act of eradication."

"Of whom? Of what?"

"Of the man who is the primary cause of all the trouble."

"Name him."

"Nick Carter."

"Ah! the detective."

"The same."

"By what means?"

"Monsieur will pardon us if we do not reply to that question directly, save only to say that the means have not been definitely decided upon. But the means, when adopted, will be heroic and certain." Then, as an apparent afterthought, he added: "The treasury would have been overflowing by now if it were not for that man."

"Bah! What is a man?" demanded the detective, with another of his scowling leers and sneers. "This Nick Carter; what is he?"

"He is a devil," said one of the men who had not spoken before.

"A devil, you say," said Nick. "Bah! it is I who am the devil; at least, so I have been called. But, this Carter; fugh! He is only a man. His strength is not greater than mine, though I have been told that it is as great. I doubt it, however. But I have seen him—the Nick Carter. He is not to be dreaded."

"But for him we would now be rich," said the third man; and at this point Gaudet discreetly withdrew.

"Putting him out of the way now is like locking the barn after the horse has been stolen," said the detective, smiling, and pushing his hat backward on his head so that the hideous scar on his forehead showed plainly.

"There are other stables and other horses," said the first man; "and it is not safe for that other person, who has not been named, to attempt to leave the country, even, until Nick Carter is out of the way for good. Therefore, it has been determined to eliminate him from the running altogether."

"Does our friend anticipate leaving the country, then, and at once?"

"When the work is done."

"Ah! the work, I thought it was done—or, at least, that it failed."

"There is another method for carrying it out to a successful finish, monsieur."

"Another method? To obtain those millions?" It was the nearest approach that had been made to a direct reference to Jeanne and her plots, but Nick risked it for the answer he might receive.

"Another method; yes, monsieur."

"And what is that one?"

"Only one person can explain that, monsieur. We have not the right. But, no doubt, monsieur will hear of it soon enough, and he will, I am sure, lend his aid to carrying it out."

"It has been begun, then?"

"Most certainly. Even now it is working."

Nick leaned forward half across the table and rested his hands upon it.

Slowly he looked from man to man of the three who were seated there, and then, also very slowly and with studied deliberation, he said:

"We talk in parables. It is useless. You know who I am, and I know who you are. You know why I am here, or, at least, if you do not know, you can guess. I am not in the habit of beating about the bush when I want a thing, and just now I want a certain thing.

which you three can supply. am Bras de Fer. You know me. Well?"

"We know you, monsieur," replied the first spokesman calmly; "but knowing you, and being well pleased that you are here, does not lessen the obligation of our oath to the person of whom we have been speaking."

"Where is she, then?"

"Safely hidden where no man, who has sworn the oath to her, can find her."

"Then how am I to find her at all, since it is necessary to see her first in order to swear the oath? And do you assert that she will demand an oath from Bras de Fer?"

There was an ugly gleam in his eyes as he asked the last question, and the man to whom it was addressed drew back a little and let one of his hands slip beneath the table.

"She will come to you, doubtless, monsieur," he said coldly, keeping his right hand beneath the table.

"Withdraw your hand from beneath the table, Monsieur Cadillac," said Nick calmly. "I did not come here alone. Look behind you."

It was an old and much-used ruse, but it worked.

The man addressed glanced involuntarily over his shoulder, and, as he did so, Nick Carter's right hand shot forward and seized upon the upper part of the arm which had been thrust under the table.

"Drop it," said Nick, with cold menace in his tone, and introducing all the ferocity into the command that he could muster. "Drop it, I say; upon the floor. Ah! that is better. It is not safe for you to be too free with your actions, or your words, with Bras de Fer. Now, Cadillac, you may pick up the weapon again and restore it to its place. You will have no need to use it."

The whole affair had been so quietly done that few in the room observed it at all.

As for the man whom Nick had called Cadillac—because he had heard the others address him so—he looked crestfallen indeed; but only for a moment.

Then he smiled, or attempted to do so, for there was no doubt that his pride had been sorely hurt, and he said:

"Your pardon, monsieur. I did not mean to offend you."

"Then why reach for your weapon? Monsieur Cadillac, there are many who would like to serve Bras de Fer, as you just now said you were going to serve

the detective, Nick Carter; but that person who succeeds some day, in doing it, will not be you—and I hope, for the success of your enterprise, that you are not the one who has been selected to stab, or to shoot, the detective."

"He will neither be stabbed nor shot," was the reply.

"No? Then blown to pieces, I suppose. It is the only other effective way."

"You have guessed it."

"Guessed it? Did I not know?"

"I cannot understand how you could know. You have only just arrived in the country, and even we, ourselves, were not certain until this evening."

"You told me, Cadillac."

"I told you, monsieur?"

"Yes; by your manner. But out upon all that. Tell me now how you intend to get possession of the millions for which our friend came to this country. Ah, bah! You have all been dunces. Where brains might have succeeded; everything has been put at sixes and sevens. You have done nothing but make botches of everything you have tried, and I have no doubt that this last attempt will be botched like the others—unless I take a hand in it."

"Even now, monsieur, the means of obtaining possession of those millions may be in our hands. It was to be accomplished to-night."

Cadillac, since the last few moments, had become far more communicative; but it must be remembered that there was not a particle of doubt in his mind that he perfectly well knew by sight the man who was seated opposite him.

If he had doubted it, perhaps, a little at first, that episode of the revolver under the table, and the quiet seizure of his arm, had convinced him. No other man than the dreaded Bras de Fer would have dared that much.

"Do you mean," demanded Nick scornfully, "that you were to obtain possession of the millions to-night?"

"No; but what is as good."

"There can be nothing as good."

"Pardon me; it will be the same thing."

"How so?"

"Possession of the owner of the millions. Now you have it, monsieur."

"Ah! abduction, eh?"

Cadillac smiled his reply, showing his white teeth.

CHAPTER X.

CHICK'S PERIL.

Nick Carter sprang from his tub and ran up the stairs to the top of the house where the gymnasium is located.

With the drops of water glistening upon his white skin and trickles of it making miniature pools upon the floor, he stood still for an instant, and then, seizing upon the horizontal bar, did the giant swing rapidly several times.

Thence he ran to the parallel bars and performed feats of skill upon them, and from there he sought the Indian clubs and swung them steadily for several moments.

And thus he continued one and another of the various exercises provided in that room, until he was perfectly dry, and the skin on his body was glowing with the tint of perfect health.

It was less than an hour after daylight, and the other members of the household were not all astir, as yet; only he knew that Chick had not returned since he was sent out the preceding afternoon to keep watch over the person of Doctor Kregoff.

Nick, himself, had returned only at the break of day, for he had found it difficult to break away from the café where he had accomplished so much; nor had he come away at all, without first making a positive appointment with Gaudet, the proprietor, to meet him there at two o'clock the succeeding morning, when a message was promised to him from Jeanne.

He had been invited to remain; Gaudet had offered him a room, but he had refused the hospitality with the usual surliness of the character he had represented, and had left the place.

For a time he went warily, suspecting that he might be followed; but he was soon convinced that the men he had seen there had no thought whatever that he was other than what he seemed to be; and then, by a roundabout way, he had reached his own home and washed away the stain that was on his body.

The exercise in the gym at the top of the house was intended to take the place of the sleep he had lost, as, indeed, it did do, for presently he descended to his room as chipper as he ever was, and perfectly in condition to take up the work of the day.

He had just finished dressing when a messenger was announced, and he hurried to the reception room, believing that it was some one whom Chick had sent.

In that he was not mistaken, for the boy—a Postal messenger—brought a verbal message from the first

assistant, saying that he was detained at a certain hospital, and would be very glad if Mr. Carter would go there at once.

"Is he hurt? Has he been injured?" the detective demanded; and the boy replied:

"Yes, sir, I think so; but not very badly, I guess. That is all I know about it."

It may be believed that Nick Carter lost no time in getting to that hospital, to which Patsy accompanied him.

They found Chick in one of the private rooms of the institution, where he was seated upon a chair near the bed, which was occupied by another person; and it needed only a single glance on the part of the detective to tell him that that other person was Doctor Kregoff.

As for Chick, he walked with a limp when he left the chair to greet them, and there were bandages around one of his arms, and around his body underneath the bathrobe with which he had been supplied.

"It was a close call for both of us," he told Nick, without waiting to be questioned; "but I am not much hurt, and I think that Kregoff will pull through. The doctors say he will."

"What was it?" asked the detective.

"A bomb. It was concealed under the bed in Kregoff's room."

"Tell me about it."

"Well, I decided that the best way to give him protection was to stay with him. The idea of a bomb never entered my head—least of all, one under the bed, running by clockwork, and timed to go off when it was almost certain that Kregoff would be in his room. It went off, all right, at midnight; and if Kregoff had been in bed, as the person who put the bomb in the room supposed he would be, there wouldn't be much left of him now."

"What did happen? How was it?"

"Well, it is a fortunate thing that we both happened to be hungry. We had been sitting in his room talking about it, and at last I suggested that we go around the corner into Third Avenue and get something to eat. We had just started out at the door; I was in the hall, outside it, and he was in the doorway when the bomb went off. His body protected me, and he is pretty badly cut up; but he will pull through."

"And you?"

"Oh, I'm all right. I'll be as well as ever in a few hours. My arm is torn a trifle, and there are a few bruises on my body; but I could have gone home to you as well as not, only the doctors thought I ought to

remain here a while. And, besides, I wanted to be near Gregoff for a time. Speak to him. He is conscious."

The detective stepped over to the bedside.

"Well, doctor," he said, "are you satisfied now that I told you the truth?"

Gregoff smiled in the affirmative.

"You needn't talk, or try to talk," said Nick. "Everything will be all right now. When all is said I think it will turn out to be a good thing that you helped that woman to escape from the hospital, for, because of her escape, we will nip another plot in the bud." He returned to Chick. "I suppose you are out of business for to-day, Chick," he said.

"I rather think I am, I'm sorry to say," was the smiling reply.

"Oh, well, I can get along very well with Patsy; only I think you would have liked to have a hand in what remains to be done."

"You bet I would. What is it? Can you tell me anything about it?"

"I can tell you what can be told in five minutes, for that is about all the time I feel that I can spare you now. And, Patsy, while I am talking, you go to the office downstairs and use the telephone, will you?"

"Yes. What for?"

"Call up Sylvester Coddington at his home. I'm rather afraid that he won't be there, and that they won't know where he is. Probably he did not return home last night, after he was called out on some important errand. Just see if I am right about that."

While Patsy was gone Nick recounted to Chick all that had happened at the café in South Fifth Avenue.

"Coddington was probably called out by some sort of a faked-up message, during the night," he said, in conclusion, "and is now in the toils of the siren. It sounds quite like a novel, doesn't it?"

"Are you going to leave him there?" asked Chick.

"Yes; until to-night—or, rather, until after two o'clock in the morning. He is safe enough."

"Think so?"

"Sure. He isn't worth a cent to Jeanne, if he's dead; alive, he may be worth a great deal, in one day or another, if she is not interfered with. She had him kidnapped in order to work her arts upon him at her leisure; that is about the size of it."

"Well, Nick, she works rather swiftly when once she gets started. I hope nothing will happen to him; he seems a nice sort of a chap."

"Oh, he will be all right. Well, Patsy, what did you find out?"

"Coddington left his home last night, a little before midnight, to go to your house," I was told. They said that Mr. Nicholas Carter telephoned to him a little before that time, and that he went out immediately after it, saying that he would return as soon as possible; but his man waited up for him all night, and he did not return. He has not returned yet. What do you suppose has happened to him?"

So Nick, in as few words as possible, told his story again.

"Then you don't intend to do anything about it till to-night?" asked Patsy.

"No. What is the use?"

"But you haven't any idea where they will take him, have you?"

"Not the slightest."

"And when the time comes for you to meet Jeanne to-night, she will most likely go to you at the café, instead of sending for you, won't she?"

"I imagine so; but one cannot tell about that."

"You won't be any wiser as to where they have hidden him away, after you have seen her, than you are now, will you?"

"I expect to be a whole lot wiser, Patsy—then."

"But, all the same—oh, well, I won't try to butt in upon what you have decided to do."

"What were you about to say?" asked the detective.

"Well, that bomb business that nearly blew Chick into the air has got me guessing; and it isn't the only bomb business about this affair, either. They told you, last night, when they supposed you to be one of them, that you were to be blown up, too."

"Correct."

"If there are two bombs in this business, there may be three."

"Or a dozen; or a hundred. Correct again."

"Jeanne Couderet does not do things by halves, chief."

"I know that quite well."

"Well, it occurs to me that while we are sitting here talking, she may be getting busy about blowing your house to pieces, and I happen to have a wife there who isn't fond of that kind of exercise. I'm for getting back there as soon as possible and giving Adelina a day out."

"Come on, Patsy. We'll go."

"And, besides, I don't believe that Coddington likes to be blown up, either."

"What are you getting at now, lad?"

"I was thinking about that clock in the bomb under the bed, that nearly did for Chick."

"Well, what about it?"

"This: Monsieur Gaudet, of the Café Chien Noir, or, in other words, the Black Dog, calls upon Mademoiselle Jeanne Coudert to-day, in company with Messieurs Cadillac, Roget, and Trouville—those were the three, weren't they?—and informs her that Monsieur Bras de Fer is in town and wants to see her. Now, Jeanne probably has private sources of information that we know nothing about, and one of those sources may have informed her that Bras de Fer is dead, or has not left France, or—well, she may be suspicious. That is what I am getting at."

"It is more than likely that she will be suspicious; at least, until she sees me."

"Then what is the matter with her preparing a little trick to play on you, if Bras de Fer should turn out to be Nick Carter, instead of Bras de Fer?"

"You mean in capturing me, or killing me, or something like that?"

"No; for she will know that you would be prepared for such a thing. But suppose she is prepared to say to you something like this: Mr. Carter, unless you let me go at once, and hasten to a place that I can direct you to, and give me your word that you will put nothing in the way of my escape for such and such a length of time, your friend Mr. Sylvester Coddington will be blown to kingdom come before you can get to him?"

"By Jove, Patsy, she might think of that."

"Uh-huh. Once a bomb, always a bomb, or words to that effect," replied Patsy.

And then the car drew up in front of Nick Carter's house.

CHAPTER XI.

FACE TO FACE WITH DEATH.

Meanwhile it might be well to look into the experiences of Sylvester Coddington, as he afterward related them to Nick Carter, for that is essentially a part of the story we are telling.

He was alone in the library of his house when his man called him to the telephone, and his first thought was that it was strange that he should be called upon at such an hour, for the time was midnight, or approximately that.

And then it occurred to him, even before he raised the receiver to his ear, that the message doubtless came

from Nick Carter, for there was no one else who might have anything to say to him at that hour of the night.

And his conjecture proved true; at least, it appeared so to him, for the voice at the other instrument, having first demanded to know if he was addressing Mr. Coddington in person, then announced that he was Joseph, Nick Carter's man.

"Oh, yes," said Coddington. "I remember seeing you there when I called. Well, Joseph, what is it?"

"Mr. Carter wishes to see you at once on very important business."

"Here, or there?" Coddington asked, and was informed that Mr. Carter was on the point of starting out of town in a limousine touring car, and was in great haste; that he was compelled to stop for a moment at the Empress Hotel, and if Mr. Coddington would go there, Mr. Carter would meet him at the Twenty-seventh Street entrance with the car, and would take him back home.

Well, Coddington went there, and found a limousine car at the entrance, or near it. A man had stepped forward and said:

"This way, sir, if you please. Mr. Carter is inside the car."

Unsuspectingly Coddington had passed through the open doorway of the car—had been instantly seized upon, a handkerchief saturated with chloroform had been pressed over his nostrils and mouth—and when he awoke to consciousness again, he was locked inside a strange room that was tightly shuttered, and from which he could find no avenue of escape.

But he found a note upon the table in the room telling him that he would not be injured in any way if he went quietly to bed and attempted no disturbance, and that in the morning all would be explained to him.

Not being an excitable person, he had gone to bed and to sleep; and in the morning he awakened to find a man there beside his bed, ready to wait upon him, and with a prepared breakfast on a tray near at hand.

The breakfast eaten, he had been asked to follow the man, and was presently led into a room where a woman rose to receive him, and greatly to his astonishment he discovered that he was in the presence of that beautiful and fascinating creature, Jeanne Coudert.

She looked toward him and smiled her most bewitching smile; she gestured toward a near-by chair and invited him to be seated, and he complied, while at the same time he demanded to know why he had been kidnapped in such an outrageous manner.

And even before she had replied to him he remembered all that Nick Carter had told him about this woman and what she might attempt to do, and he said to himself:

"Here is my opportunity."

"You have been brought here to me, because I desired it," she told him. "Did you think that I was dead when I escaped from the hospital?"

"No," he replied; "I did not think that."

"Nick Carter sent for you almost at once, after he heard about it, didn't he?" she asked.

"I went to his house, if that is what you mean?" he replied to her.

"And you were warned against me, of course?"

"Naturally."

"With the sought-for effect?"

"I am not sure as to that, madam."

"Do you think that I am really so dreadful?" she asked him, leaning toward him in her chair.

"I think, madam, that you are very beautiful, very charming, and also very mysterious. But I do not understand why you have had me brought here to you."

"Before I tell you that, Mr. Coddington, confess to me that Nick Carter warned you that I had not made the last effort to obtain the possession of your millions, which are, after all, more rightly mine than yours; for, if your Cousin Sam had lived, I would now be the mistress of them. Am I right?"

"I was so warned; yes, madam."

"And did he tell you how I would make the effort to possess myself of them?"

"He suggested several methods."

"Did he not tell you that at least one of those methods would be to bring you under the spell of what he calls my wiles? Did he not say that I would try to fascinate you, and win your love, perhaps, and so marry you?" She asked the questions unblushingly and coolly.

Coddington assented. He admitted the truth of what she said. He could not do otherwise, since she seemed to be so thoroughly aware of all that Nick Carter had warned him against.

"Well," she said, "I shall do nothing of the sort. But I shall ask you a very plain, straightforward question; and that question will tell you precisely why I have had you kidnapped and brought here."

"Very well, madam," he said.

"Would you take me for a wife, would you wed me, if I should offer myself to you?"

"No, madam," he replied, with the same coolness with which she asked the question.

"Your reply, then, compels other questions, Mr. Coddington."

"I shall endeavor to be as frank with all of them as I was with that one," he responded.

"Am I not beautiful?"

"Exceedingly so."

"And do you not think that I can be charming as well?"

"I am sure of it."

"If I had never committed a crime, if I had always lived the life of a good woman, if I were upright and true in all my conduct, do you suppose you might have given a different answer to the first question?"

"I cannot answer that, because I do not know."

"But, suppose I should swear to you that I will always be what I have just said? that never again will I commit a wrong act; that always I will live up to the best there is in me—and I have just as much good in me as any other woman has—suppose that?"

"I cannot suppose it."

"You would still refuse to make me your wife?"

"I would know, for one thing, that it is the money you desire, and not myself."

"Suppose I should tell you that I wish for both?"

"The answer would be the same, madam."

"Don't you believe that I have the power to teach you to love me?"

"Not unless you drugged me first."

She bit her lips with vexation, or in amusement; he did not know which.

"All that leads me to the final question," she said presently. "And believe me, Mr. Coddington, I shall ask it in all seriousness. It may sound to you like a joke, or a threat, but it is neither; it is a plain statement of an alternative."

"Well, what is it?"

"Would you prefer to die, to go to your grave now, at once, or, at least, within a few hours, to the alternative of marrying me?"

"I think, madam, from what I know of you, and from what I understand to be your insatiable greed to possess yourself of my fortune, that to marry you would merely be deferring the alternative. If I should choose the contract instead of the funeral, I would be elected for the funeral all the same a few hours, or days, or weeks, later."

"Oh, no; not at all. I am not so fond of killing as all that."

"You are much too fond of it to suit my ideas for a wife, or to induce me to cast my lot with such a fiend as you are," he said hotly.

He had tried to hold his temper throughout this extraordinary scene, but he found it impossible; and he was made angrier still when she only laughed at him.

He took another step toward her, but she instantly presented a pistol at his head, and commanded him, sternly, to resume his former position.

Then she touched a bell, and two men entered the room where they were, and both of them were armed.

"You see," she said, "how futile it would have been for you to attack me—even if you could bring yourself to the point of attacking a woman." She motioned to the men to go away again, and then she resumed:

"I will tell you now exactly what you may expect: I shall keep you here with me during the day, and you will have all that time to observe me and to think over what has been said. At any moment, when you think you have changed your mind, you may tell me so. I shall not ask you the question. If, when night comes, you have not replied in the affirmative, or discovered some other means of transferring your property to me, you will be subjected to the last test, which shall end happily, or miserably, for you, as you choose to elect."

During the remainder of that day he was compelled to remain with her, although she did not deign to notice him, or to reply to him when he addressed her during those hours.

In the afternoon three men called upon her, and they talked for a long time, in French, which he did not understand; only he heard the name *Bras de Fer* mentioned repeatedly; remembered it because madam had started violently at the first mention of it.

When the men had gone she had talked to Coddington for the first time that day.

"There is a man now in the city," she told him, "who has long sought to make me his wife, but, unfortunately, I hate him with a hate that is terrible. He has come here from my own country to seek me, and those fools who were here have led him on until he almost knows my hiding place. Well, Mr. Coddington, to accomplish the death of that man would be almost as great a boon to me as to win all your fortune; but I think I now see a way of compassing both desires at the same time. You shall die, and I will find a way to possess myself of your millions afterward; never fear as to that. And *Bras de Fer* shall die at the same time, or near it. . . . But, no; I will keep to my word with you. You shall have the one more chance."

She left him alone, then.

Several hours later she returned with the two men he had first seen, and at the muzzle of a revolver he was compelled to put his hands behind his back, and presently he was made to seat himself upon a large chair, which he afterward discovered was fastened to the floor so that it could not be moved; and he was bound there securely, so that he could not escape.

And later, when it was near midnight, she brought a small, polished box into the room, and he could hear a ticking, as if from a clock, inside of it. She put it on the floor, just out of his reach, and, pointing toward it, said:

"Mr. Coddington, that box contains an infernal machine, which will explode at four of the clock in the morning, if the mechanism is not stopped before that time. It will wreck this house and tear you to pieces, leaving not enough to bury decently. At half-past three one of my men will enter this room, and, if you have changed your mind, he will open the box and stop the mechanism; if you have not changed it, he will go away and leave you to your fate. You have until then to decide."

Then, with a low laugh, she left him.

And after that he sat for hours, watching that terrible box with staring eyes, and now and then glancing at the clock on the mantel. And at half-past three the man who had been directed to come for his last answer did not appear. He could only decide that the man had become frightened and had deserted his post.

in:

CHAPTER XII.

THE INFERNAL MACHINE.

Nick and Patsy arrived home without incident, and all was in perfect order when they got there. If there was an attempt to be made to blow up the detective's house, it had not been done as yet.

But Nick, who had rather ignored the threat he had heard in the café, now took it into consideration, and a telephone message to headquarters brought him the aid he wanted, so that for the balance of the day and night his house was well guarded. It may as well be said right here that nothing of the kind was attempted.

That evening, he gave Patsy his instructions, telling him exactly what to do and how to do it; and later he made himself up again in the character of *Bras de Fer*, the Apache.

Shortly after midnight he sauntered into the café, as

he had done the preceding night, pausing near the door to search every face in the room, as he knew it was the habit of Bras de Fer to do always, before he entered a place and seated himself.

The proprietor came forward at once to receive him with all the effusion that was his national characteristic, and Nick was led to the same table he had occupied the preceding night.

"The message has come sooner than I expected," he told the supposed Bras de Fer. "It is only a few moments since word came from the beautiful queen of our society that she was overjoyed to know that monsieur is here, and that she will meet him in person at this place at two o'clock. Is it not well, monsieur?"

"Splendid," said Nick, casting his eyes about him and discovering that the three men who had been with him at table the preceding night were not in evidence.

"Where is Cadillac, and where are the other two?" he demanded gruffly.

"Ah! monsieur, they are extremely busy. I am told that they are preparing a little surprise for monsieur."

"A surprise?" Nick looked at Gaudet closely and suspiciously.

"Yes. There is to be a gathering here, to meet monsieur. They have gone to summon the others."

"Oh; that is it, is it?"

The detective wondered what he would do with himself during the two hours that he had to wait. He confessed to himself that he smelled a plot; that the words of the proprietor had made him uneasy; and presently he left the table and strode toward the door.

"Monsieur is not going away?" asked Gaudet anxiously.

"Yes; for the present. I will return in good time," he replied, and went outside.

There, on a corner, he came to a pause and looked around him, having first looked back toward the café entrance to discover if he was followed.

Satisfied that he was not, he turned the corner and walked on a little distance, and at last found that he was looking down upon a peculiar mark that had been made, with a piece of chalk, on the pavement.

The chalk mark was a sign that had been agreed upon between him and Patsy, and he then passed on until he found another and another. Then he retraced his steps toward the café, passed it, and discovered other marks of the same sort.

When he finally reentered the café, he knew at least that Patsy had carried out his part of the work, and

that he would not be without assistance when he should call for it.

For that he would require assistance that night, he well knew.

The men who frequented that café would fight like demons if they were cornered, and they were all oath-sworn to fight for one another, whenever occasion required it.

But he also realized that to wait there until the arrival of Jeanne was the only safe way of recapturing her.

He wondered if she suspected, by any chance, that it was not Bras de Fer who was awaiting her. He did not know that she had no doubt of it, because of the relations between her and that terrible Apache. He did not know that she had fled from France as much to escape him, as to accompany Sam Coddington to America. He did not know that Bras de Fer would have followed her in fact, had he had any idea where to find her.

He could not suspect that upon receiving the intelligence that Bras de Fer was in the city, seeking her, she had merely supposed that he had found her out, and had come to claim her—and least of all did he realize that she was coming there that night with the full intention of killing Bras de Fer, and that the plot against Nick Carter had been temporarily abandoned for that reason.

It was a quarter to two when he reentered the café; the bar had been closed off from the rest of the room, and the place was not nearly filled.

He counted those who were present, and counted just a dozen; no more; and he thought that many of them looked toward him furtively, as if they were remaining for a definite purpose.

He noticed, too, that not one of them had been there the preceding night.

Just before two o'clock, he left his seat and passed rapidly toward the door, but paused beside it, stepping to one side; and he had timed himself nicely, for, as he did so, the door opened and Cadillac entered, followed by Roget and Trouville—and by a third person, also dressed as a man, but in whom he instantly recognized Jeanne Coudert.

And upon that instant, when he discovered her, he acted with an impulse born of the discovery.

All his previously made plans were cast aside in that instant, for he sensed the fact that, whether he was Bras de Fer or not, he was to be made the victim of a plot.

The door had not closed behind the disguised woman, who appeared to be a young man, when Nick Carter leaped forward toward her, seized her in his arms, raised her clear of the floor, held her for a fleeting instant between him and the other occupants of the room, and then dashed into the street, bearing her away with him.

And, although she struggled desperately, evidently striving to reach a weapon that she carried, the costume was new to her, and she could not reach it; and he ran upon the street with her in his arms, while with his left hand he managed to fire his revolver three times into the air.

Instantly, from doorways, and from every place near at hand which would conceal a person, men in uniform appeared, running toward the café.

A whole squad of policemen was there, ready and waiting for the signal, brought there and stationed by Patsy, working under Nick Carter's directions.

And the men from the café rushed into the street in pursuit of Nick, only to be met by the blue-coated officers; and there began, then, a street fight which has ever since been spoken of at headquarters as one of the most desperate, while it lasted, of any that had ever happened in the streets of New York.

But it did not last long.

A patrol wagon dashed around a corner with more officers; another wagon came around another corner, and it was not long before they were filled with the prisoners that had been taken, and were again on their way to the station house; and Gaudet and Cadillac, Roget and Trouville were among the prisoners, as were nearly all of the men who had been waiting inside the café.

At the station house Jeanne Coudert turned upon Nick Carter and laughed aloud; then she bent toward him, and, in a whisper, she said:

"Again you have won against me, Nick Carter, but at a dear price, as you will soon know." She glanced up at the clock against the wall, and added: "In just forty-five minutes from now the house where I have been in hiding will blow up, and with it will go—Ah!"

The exclamation was caused by the fact that Nick Carter turned suddenly away from her. He seized Alphonse Gaudet in his arms, lifted him from the floor, and ran with him from the station house to the street; and there he literally threw the man into an automobile he had seen at the door when they entered the station house.

He knew that Jeanne would never in the world tell him how to find that house, even if her own life was at stake; but he also knew that, although Jeanne had recognized him as not being Bras de Fer, Gaudet had not. He was still that dreaded Apache to the proprietor of the café.

And he knew that Gaudet was aware of the location of the hiding place of Jeanne Coudert, and could take him there.

As the detective threw himself into the car after the form of Gaudet, he called out to the chauffeur:

"For your life drive with all speed where I shall direct you in a moment. And now, Gaudet, direct me to Jeanne's house, and you shall go free if we arrive there in time. I swear it! But, if you do not——"

His hand closed so tightly upon Gaudet's arm that the man cried out in pain and terror.

"I will, I will, I will!" he cried; and almost incoherently he gave the street and number of the house.

Nick repeated them to the driver of the car, and they shot forward like a projectile.

"Gaudet, have you a key to that house?" the detective demanded when they were nearly there.

"Yes; it is my own house, why shouldn't I?" was the reply, and he produced it.

Nick seized it as they came to a stop before the door of the house, and, as he leaped from the car to the pavement, he called out:

"Run, now, Gaudet, while you have a chance. If I ever see you again——"

He did not complete the sentence. He was halfway up the steps already. The key was shot into the lock of the door, and Nick dashed through into the house.

"Coddington, where are you?" he called aloud, as soon as he was inside; and from the rear room on that floor the answer came.

Nick dashed into the room. The box was ticking aloud on the floor. He seized it and flung it through the window, curtain, glass, and all; then, with lightninglike motions, he cut the cords that held Coddington, and almost carried him from the house into the street.

But no explosion followed upon these mad efforts, and, after a long wait at a safe distance, the detective returned to the house, went into the yard in the rear, found the dreaded box, and opened it.

It was found to contain nothing more deadly than an ordinary alarm clock, with which Jeanne had hoped to frighten Coddington into acceptance of her plans, for she had fully intended to return there before three.

That is all.

Jeanne Coudert paid the penalty for her last crime this time.

She did not succeed in charming a second jury, and she was convicted and sentenced to imprisonment for life.

THE END.

"The Mark of a Circle; or, Nick Carter's Seven Sworn Enemies," is the story for the next issue, No. 737. Seven men who have served long prison terms, through the work of Nick Carter, resolve, on the expiration of their terms, to devote all their time and energy to the great detective's downfall. They concoct one of the most dastardly, but also most ingenious, plots ever conceived by evil brains, and Nick, Chick, and Patsy find something more than an ordinary task cut out for them. Don't miss this unusual story. Out February 11th.



NEW YORK, February 4, 1911.

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HANNIBAL'S RACE.

By W. W. TREE.

He stood upon the deck, the king of his kind. He was of Arab stock. His nostrils were large and mobile; his dark, oval eyes, full of fire and spirit, seemed to shoot flashes of lightning over the shadowed waters of the foaming ocean.

He took in long inspirations of the sea air, and his chest expanded with every breath.

His name was Hannibal, and he belonged to Annie Melton, for whom her father, the captain of the schooner *Canton*, aboard which the animal was now confined, in the bin aft, had bought him of an Arab, a year before.

His daughter, who often accompanied her parent on his voyages, had persuaded him to let her take the horse with her on this trip.

As the vessel left her port, Morovia, Africa, bound to the Gold Coast, where the captain was going to trade for gold dust, the girl stood admiring Hannibal, while she, in her turn, was being admired by William Armstrong, her father's clerk, and one of her suitors, who envied the caresses she bestowed upon the quadruped.

For the latter the skipper had bought plenty of feed, but he had not reckoned upon the animal's requiring so much water, of which he partook at a rate which excited fears that his supply would fail.

Two weeks later the baffling head winds which the vessel had encountered died away, and a dead calm followed.

The sun was burning hot, the sea like molten quicksilver. Hannibal, the horse, alone seemed insensible to the heat. His eye was as bright, his frame as stately and strong as ever.

"He wants more water," remarked Annie to her father.

The latter bowed his head.

"He can have no more."

"Oh, father!"

"The men are already on very short allowance," said Melton.

"But the horse may have a part of my share," said Annie.

"Your share, my poor girl, is but three gallons. The men have only two gallons apiece to last till we reach the Gold Coast. If we had a good breeze we could reach it in two days. As it is, the calm may last a week."

"My poor horse!" said Annie.

She, however, coaxed her parent to give it a part of her share.

It was only a small quantity. Before night Hannibal panted; there was a lurid light in his eyeballs.

Five days passed, and the weather remained unchanged.

The horse neighed pitifully. His mouth was dry and he was very restive. He plunged about wildly, kicking at the bin. Now and then he would look at the smooth, glassy sea, with eyes like two live coals. Occasionally he would drop down and roll about with a crackling sound in his throat.

Annie wept as she watched the suffering beast, which had had but two quarts of water during the calm weather. It was all the captain could spare.

"He can have some of my allowance to drink," said William Armstrong, as he noticed the girl's distress.

"No, sir; you will want it before we get to land. Annie," added the captain to his daughter, "unless a breeze springs up before night we will have to kill the animal and throw him overboard, as they used to do in the horse latitudes. Better he should perish at once than suffer as he does. There seems no prospect of getting water for days."

Annie wrung her hands.

In the afternoon, the calm still prevailing, the captain, axe in hand, advanced toward the horse.

The young girl begged and pleaded with him in vain.

William Armstrong, as the skipper raised his axe to strike the animal a deadly blow, caught his arm.

"Hold, sir, I entreat!" he cried. "Suppose we allow the horse another day or two. I will go without water until then, and he can have some of mine."

But the captain rather impatiently pushed the young man to one side, and again raised his axe.

Armstrong sprang directly in front of him to stay the blow.

Melton's temper was aroused at this. He dropped the axe and was about to strike the clerk with his fist when Annie caught his wrist with both hands.

"No, father, no! Don't strike him!" she cried, in a beseeching voice.

At the same moment Armstrong pointed to windward.

"Thank fortune, we are going to have rain!" he said.

"Father, father, do you hear!" cried Annie, putting both arms around his neck and pressing her cheek to his shoulder.

"Well, we shall see," said Melton, as he moved away and looked to windward.

There, sure enough, were heavy clouds rolling up from the horizon.

Hannibal raised his head and uttered a wistful, piercing neigh, as if already sniffing the rain.

Half an hour after down it came, splashing and roaring—a perfect torrent.

"Heaven bless you, sir," said Annie to Armstrong. "It was through you my horse was saved."

Two casks were filled while the rain continued, and Hannibal had a good drink.

Moreover, a strong breeze came with the shower. Two days from that time the Gold Coast was reached, and a supply of water was obtained.

After the captain anchored he permitted Annie to accompany him and his clerk ashore with the horse.

The latter was towed to land on a raft, which Melton had brought out with him for that purpose, as well as for the better conveyance of such goods as he might wish to take to the natives in exchange for gold dust.

The young girl rode by her parent's side to one of the trading settlements which he had come to visit.

While her father was making a bargain with the villagers, Annie cantered away to a wooded hill, half a mile off, which would afford a good view of the wild scenery around her. It was a favorite resort of hers whenever she came to this part of the country. Ere she ascended the hill she was obliged to pass through a valley in which there was much tangled shrubbery.

Mr. Melton did not notice her absence until he had completed his bargain.

"Rash girl!" he then said, as he descried her form on the hill. "She should not have gone away."

He and his clerk, each of whom was provided with a good rifle, moved toward the hill.

Annie had meantime dismounted, and her horse had walked off some yards from her, where he was cropping the long, fresh grass on the side of the elevation.

Suddenly the young girl was startled by a deep, smothered growl, like the muttering of distant thunder, and, looking down into the valley, she beheld, to her dismay, an enormous lion bounding out of the shrubbery.

A terrible appearance he presented as he came on. His huge head, his tawny hide, his great round eyes glaring like balls of fire, his wrinkled brow, his broad breast and flowing mane, together with the stains of mud and reddish clay adhering to his tapering form, were well calculated to appeal to a stouter heart than Annie's. And then his voice! Becoming louder as he advanced, his awful roar seemed to shake the very earth, and to roll along to the uttermost bounds of the horizon.

Affrighted flocks of birds flew screaming skyward. Far in the distance rose the bleating of the alarmed deer and the clattering of whole troops of scampering apes.

Hannibal pricked up his ears. Well did he recognize that fearful sound, which he had often heard in his native desert.

His dark, oval eyes expanded. He wheeled round and stared, as if transfixed, at the foe of his race.

Annie's voice broke the spell.

"Hannibal! Hannibal!" she cried, in faltering accents.

It was high time, for the lion was now halfway up the hill.

The good steed gave three bounds, which carried him to her side.

The roar of the savage king beast boomed upon the air with an intonation in which seemed concentrated the rage of a thousand demons, as the girl sprang into her saddle.

"Go, Hannibal! go!" rang the womanly voice, strangely contrasting with that of her pursuer.

The horse responded to the roar of his enemy with a sort of defiant neigh.

For an instant he seemed to gather all the power of his springy muscles for the race, and then away he went like a thunderbolt.

Not swifter the rush of the avalanche, or the flash of the volcanic lava tide, than the speed with which he descended the hill.

Away! Away!

Never before, brave Hannibal, hadst thou such need of showing thy mettle!

Now how the wind whistles in thy ears! The trees, the bushes, the rocks fly past the vision of thy beautiful rider! Thy hoofs seem scarcely to touch the ground—thy broad nostrils, expanding, take in drafts of exhilarating air. There is lightning in thy veins.

On went the gallant horse!

But mighty and swift was the foe behind him.

He did not lose, if he did not gain on his intended victim.

His keen gaze marked the direction of the steed.

With the cunning of his kind, he took a roundabout course to head off the fugitives.

At the same moment the crack of two rifles was heard in the distance.

It was the agonized father and lover who had fired.

But they were too far off to take good aim. They reloaded and kept on.

Seeing the lion turn off to the left, Annie suddenly whirled her horse round and headed it at right angles with the settlement. This route would finally take her to the beach.

The lion then changed his course. He plunged out of sight into a jungle.

Hoping he had gone off, the girl now thought of making

for the settlement. She looked that way, but she saw her father and Armstrong shaking their heads and motioning her to keep on.

On she went.

All at once she perceived that she was approaching a small elevation of ground. She saw her parent and his companion still motioning to her, but she could not understand what they meant.

A few more bounds brought the horse to the summit of the hillock. There was another opposite to it, thus forming a sort of valley, or hollow, about eleven feet wide and fifteen deep.

To her dismay, Annie now beheld the lion crouched in this hollow.

As if he had concluded that Hannibal could not leap over this broad space, he had got there in the valley, unperceived, by keeping among the bushes, and lain in wait for his intended prey.

But Hannibal's eyes seemed to flash fire. He braced every nerve, and as the lion, with an appalling roar—with bristling mane and gnashing fangs—bounded upward toward him, he gave one tremendous, supple spring, which carried him over the beast and clean across the hollow to the brow of the elevation opposite.

And now Annie was enabled to lead for the village, the lion not thirty yards behind her.

It seemed to her that he was gaining, but her thrilling voice rang in the ears of the horse and infused life in his veins:

"On, Hannibal, on!"

The roar of the lion still vibrated on the ears of steed and rider; still his active form clove the air, his feet at each bound scarcely seeming to touch the earth.

But now Annie saw her father and Armstrong not two hundred yards off, running toward her, with a large party of villagers behind them, armed with spears, bows, and arrows.

A few more leaps of the good steed and he was so near her friends that Melton and his companion were enabled to aim well at the savage brute coming on behind.

Both shots took effect.

The king of beasts, struck slantingly in the head and breast, fell on his side.

But only for an instant.

Up he rose, more vengeful and fierce than ever, and continued the pursuit.

The rifles, reloaded, again crashed on the air.

Only Armstrong's bullet struck him.

It passed through the brain of the lion, which fell, rolling over and over, and biting at the ground in its rage.

Now came the whizzing of a shower of arrows.

Pierced by half a dozen barbs, the grim animal, with one terrible roar, bounded upright, and then fell upon his face, stone-dead.

A few minutes later Annie was in her father's arms, while Armstrong held the panting horse by the bridle and lovingly patted the animal which had saved the girl who was so dear to him.

"Armstrong," said the captain, taking him by both hands, "it is to you I owe the life of my child, for it was you who induced me to spare the horse on that day when I thought it necessary to kill it and throw it overboard. Had I killed it I shudder to think of what would have been the fate of my dear girl. Had not the steed been with her she could not have run far, after seeing the lion, ere she would have been in its jaws."

"That is true," said Annie. "And I should certainly have visited that hill, even had the horse not been with me, as it is one of my favorite resorts in these parts. How fortunate, therefore, for me that you did not kill my noble steed. By sparing his life you enabled him to save mine."

"Aye, and how can I sufficiently repay Armstrong for persuading me to spare the animal?" said Melton joyfully.

Annie directed a soft, shy glance at her lover, full of tenderness and gratitude.

There was encouragement in the expression.

Not many hours after, the young man won her consent to be his wife.

The grateful captain, when he heard of it, was pleased with the match, and the twain were married soon after they returned to Monrovia.

Hannibal was long with them, and, next to her husband, her children, and her father, the happy wife loved this horse better than any living creature in the world.

A LUCKY TUMBLE.

"I can!"

"You can't!"

"Well, then, I'll show you that I can!"

Half a dozen boys were clustered at the foot of a great cliff. One of them looked very angry and defiant.

"I'll show you!" he repeated, flinging off his jacket and beginning to ascend the cliff.

The other boys scarcely believed him to be in earnest till he was several feet above their heads; then, with one accord, they urged him to come back.

"Oswald, come down. We were only teasing you. None of us could do it, any more than you. Come back, old chap. What's the good of risking your neck for a bit of chaff?"

"But Oswald Lisle went on as though he did not hear. He was a fine-looking boy, of fourteen, with a very resolute will of his own. He had set that will on scaling this crag, simply because his mates had said it was a feat beyond his power.

It was not such very hard work at first, and he progressed rapidly, but as he got higher and higher his task became more difficult. The face of the cliff, which had at first afforded plenty of hold for hands and feet, grew gradually smoother and the low bushes and grassy tufts less plentiful.

Still the foolish boy toiled on and up, the sweat pouring off his face and his muscles all a-quiver with the unwanted strain.

At last he came to a stop. The rock above him shelved outward in a great overhanging mass, defying him to proceed. He looked about helplessly, for he felt "played out," as he would have phrased it. He had lost his cap at the outset of his journey, and the sun, beating fiercely on his head, made him sick and giddy.

To his right, a few yards away, was a little platform, at which he looked wistfully. It would have afforded rest, but, alas! it was inaccessible. There was nothing to cling to, and below—

For the first time Oswald realized his danger. With a gasping sob he looked to his left. Ah! there was more hope that way. If he could only get down—get back to his comrades! How far away they seemed! How long a time since he had left them!

Slowly and painfully he began to crawl sideways to where the descent looked easier. Whether he would ever have accomplished it, it is impossible to say, for a sea bird flew suddenly out of a hole close by him and startled the already unnerved boy into losing his hold. Down he went, shrieking and clutching wildly at the air. Down, down, till he fell heavily into a large clump of bushes and disappeared.

It was a good many minutes before he recovered himself sufficiently to look about him. The only light came from the hole through which he had fallen, and it dimly revealed a good-sized cave, above the floor of which lay many barrels, bales, and boxes in great confusion.

Oswald forgot his bruises and his fright in a sudden, exciting conviction that dawned on him. He was in a smugglers' cave.

He scrambled to his feet and began to peer about among the litter. Presently he came upon a pewter jug half full of gold pieces. He was busily engaged in counting them when

he heard a shout, and, looking up, saw one of his comrades peering down through the hole.

"Oswald, are you there—are you dead?"

"Not much," responded our hero coolly. "I've made a rare find, Dick. Tell the others to come!"

The others came without more ado, for it needed no great agility to reach the cave from the bottom of the cliff. Their wonder and delight were somewhat damped when Oswald remarked ruefully:

"We'll have to tell, and the government will grab the whole lot."

But the government was generous, and permitted Oswald to keep the money—nearly one thousand dollars.

"That was a lucky tumble," said he. "I missed a lot of hard climbing and fell into a fortune!"

But in his heart he knew that he had escaped a great danger, and was very thankful.

MISSED HIMSELF.

A French landed proprietor and a colonel of dragoons quarreled, and a challenge to a duel followed. Blood only could wash out the insult that one had put upon the other. It was determined that the duel should be "*A l'Americain*," that is, that lots should be drawn, and that the loser should retire and shoot himself.

The next morning the opponents and their seconds met at a small café outside the town. Lots were duly drawn; the landed proprietor was the winner.

The colonel took his bad fortune calmly; he wrote a few lines upon a piece of paper, which he handed to his second, took an affectionate farewell of all, and forgave his more fortunate adversary, as a Christian gentleman ought to do.

Then, accepting the loaded pistol, he retired to an adjoining room and closed the door. The rest of the party remained breathlessly awaiting the detonation which was to convey to them the finale of the tragedy.

At last it came. Eagerly they ran to the door of the fatal chamber, which was thrown open, and disclosed the supposed defunct duellist standing on the threshold grasping the smoking weapon.

"Good gracious, gentlemen!" exclaimed he with a bland smile. "Is it not unfortunate? I have missed myself!"

A TESTIMONIAL THAT WASN'T USED.

"How do you like your new typewriter, Mr. Smith?" inquired the agent.

"It's immense!" was the enthusiastic response. "I wonder how I ever got along without it."

"Well, would you mind giving me a little testimonial to that effect?"

"Certainly not; do it gladly."

So he rolled up his sleeves, and in an incredibly short time pounded out this:

"*anted Using these automatic Back-action atype writer for three months and Over: i unhesitatingly pronounce it pronoe it tt be al ad even more than the manufacturs claim? for it. During the time been in our possessio n e i, th ree monthz! it has nore th, an paid for it self in the Saving o Fe time and labbrz*"—John T. Smish."

"There you are, sir."

"Thanks," said the agent dubiously.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

George—"Who is that pretty girl you stopped to talk to?"

Jack—"She's nobody. Just my sister."

George—"I wish you would introduce me to her."

Jack—"No use. She wouldn't consider you fit to associate with."

George—"Eh? Why not?"

Jack—"She's seen you with me."

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